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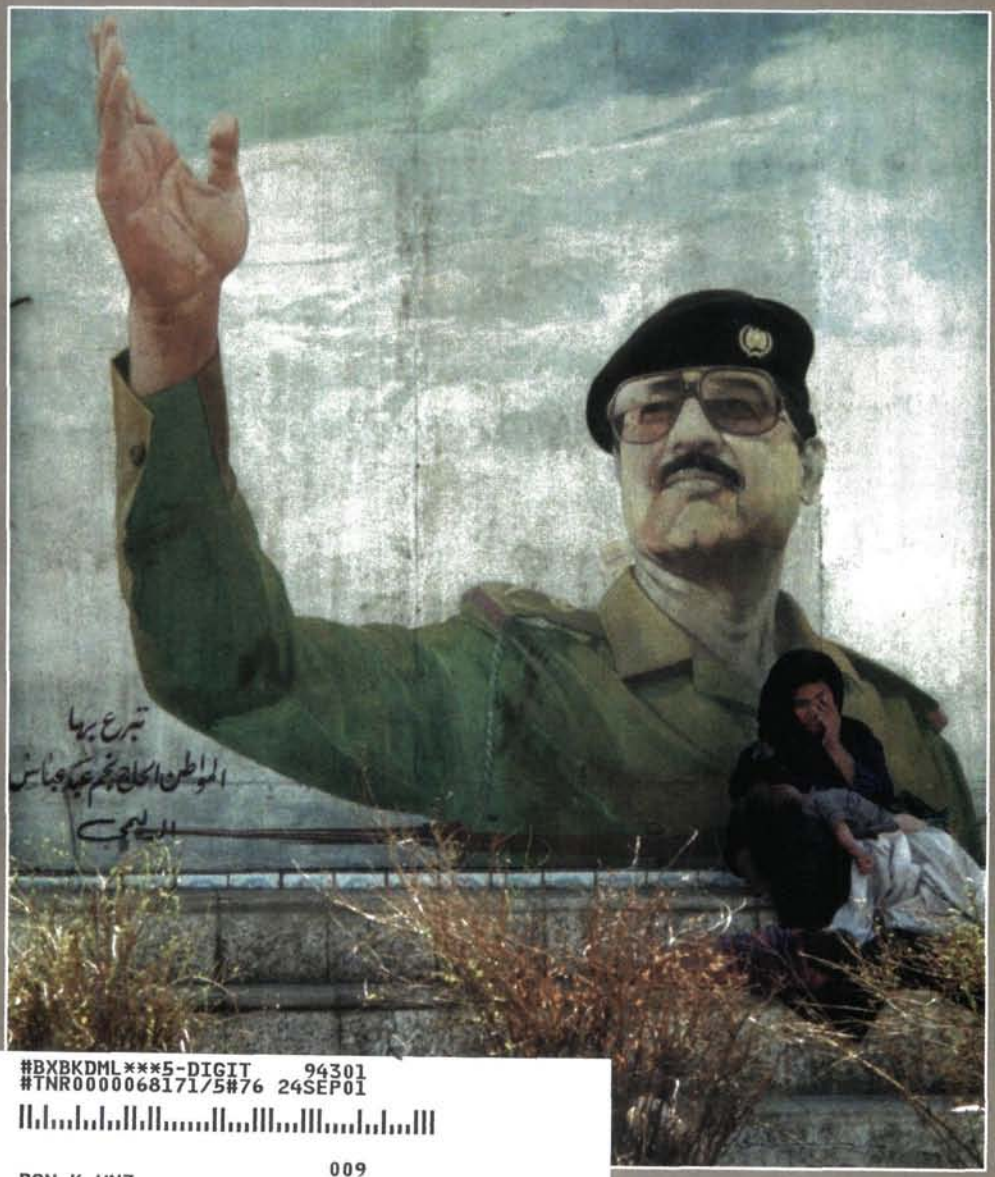

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Where We Stand

A commentary on public education and other critical issues

Tough Luck!

By SANDRA FELDMAN, President
American Federation of Teachers

Many Americans consider the free-market system a cure-all. Well, I grew up in a poor neighborhood, and I know first hand about the limitations of markets. In poor neighborhoods, people get the poorest quality in everything controlled by the market system—food, clothing, housing. That's as true now as it was when I was a kid. Look at our scandalous child-care "system." Or at our former health-care system—which was great for the middle class and rich but lousy for the poor—or the managed-care model we're now struggling with. I'm not suggesting that we get rid of the free-market system; it's good at many things. But ensuring equity is not one of them.

So we'll be making a big mistake if we let voucher advocates sell us on a free-market cure for K-12 education. I'm particularly concerned about the assertion that vouchers would save poor, minority children who are stuck in bad schools. The fact is, vouchers would leave many poor children worse off than they are now. Just look at the for-profit trade school scandals.

Voucher supporters often use the GI bill, Pell grant, and college student loan programs in their sales pitch. After all, they argue, those public dollars go to private as well as public colleges, and they've helped millions of students, many of them poor.

Of course, this seductive analogy ignores the obvious differences between a free and compulsory K-12 system and higher education. It also fails to mention for-profit, or proprietary, trade schools—even though they make up one-third of the schools eligible to receive federal grants and loans for higher education. We hear about these schools only when scandals about how they've ripped off students and misused taxpayers' money hit the headlines.

Targeting the Poor

To be fair, many for-profit trade schools are reputable businesses that help students gain marketable skills. But over the years, government reports, newspaper exposés, and Congressional hearings have uncovered many other schools with poor programs, high dropout rates, and lousy placement records. In fact, by the early 1990s, the scandals were so bad that Congress had to intervene. These "schools" exist primarily to cash in on money from federal programs. Their targets are poor people, often recruited in unemployment lines or housing projects with promises of good-paying jobs at the end of their "training."

The free-market system is good at many things, but ensuring equity is not one of them.

The following examples are typical:

- Three cosmetology schools, described in a 1995 Senate hearing, enrolled 4,300 students over a four-year period and received $6.7 million in public money to educate them. The programs were so deficient that only 80 students passed the state licensing exam—at a cost to taxpayers of $84,000 per license.
- A Florida for-profit school purporting to train secretaries and travel agents showed, in its staffing, where its real priorities lay. The school employed 109 sales representatives, 70 people to handle federal grant and loan applications—and just 23 instructors. According to a 1991 Senate report, the school received over $150 million in federal grants and loans between 1985 and 1989.

A Reality Check

We often hear that if we give poor, minority families taxpayer-funded vouchers to pay for private schools, excellent schools will spring up in their neighborhoods to accommodate their kids. The trade school scandals provide a reality check on this kind of talk. Undoubtedly there would be some good private schools created to take advantage of voucher money, but there would also be many run by unscrupulous or incompetent people. And, as with the for-profit trade schools, the worst schools would be overwhelmingly concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods.

It's true there are also many rotten public schools. But ask yourself where the possibility for doing a good job with poor kids is greater. With a free-market system, winning and, especially, losing are built in. So is telling the loser, "Tough luck! You should've been better or smarter." But when schools are a *public* responsibility, it's not every parent or taxpayer for himself. What happens is a common concern—no, an obligation—to make sure there are no losers. Public education is falling short of its responsibility to poor students now, but we're working hard to turn around failing schools. And we're already seeing results. With vouchers, we'd still have failing schools—and no obligation to do anything about them except to say, "Tough luck!" ■

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CORRESPONDENCE

Queer science

To the editors:

In response to Andrew Sullivan's article ("False Bennett," January 5 & 12): Given what I now know, I believe there are flaws with Paul Cameron's study. One cannot extrapolate from his methodology and say that the average male homosexual life span is 43 years.

Nevertheless, there is overwhelming, incontrovertible evidence that indicates the male homosexual life span is considerably shorter than nonhomosexuals. A male homosexual has as much as a 50 percent chance of acquiring HIV by middle age. In 1995, AIDS was the leading cause of death among all Americans aged 25 to 44, and homosexual men, who make up less than two percent of the population, accounted for 50 percent of all new AIDS cases in 1995 and 1996 (the percentage was higher in previous years). All the medical evidence indicates that a tragically high percentage of homosexual males acquire AIDS—and AIDS is overwhelmingly about young people dying. Is this news to anybody?

Even Sullivan agrees. Consider what he wrote in *The New York Times Magazine*: "Suddenly, it seemed, as my 20s merged into my 30s, everyone was infected. Faces you had got used to seeing in the gym kept turning up on the obit pages. New friends took you aside to tell you they had just tested positive. Old flames suddenly were absent from the bars." Sullivan has "lost friend after friend" in "a health crisis as profound as any in modern American history." Male homosexuals are "a group of men who have witnessed a scale of loss historically visited only upon war generations." What AIDS has done to homosexuals is a "horror," a "veil of terror," and a "natural calamity." Such apocalyptic language is not invoked because AIDS is killing lots of 73-year-old men; it is because, as Sullivan wrote, AIDS is "visiting death upon so many, so young."

If Sullivan doesn't believe this, he and his allies should tell us, so we can rechannel the huge amount of federal money away from AIDS research and into other areas.

Sullivan says I have failed in my "moral and intellectual obligation" to propose anything to slow the spread of AIDS and homosexual promiscuity. But in 1987, I delivered an address at Georgetown University in which I advocated expanded AIDS testing and "contact notification." Unfortunately, many homosexual activists successfully opposed these sound measures. Fortunately, the Gay Men's Health Crisis is reversing its earlier position.

To repeat the argument Sullivan ignores: If the president had a genuine concern for the well-being of homosexuals, he should speak against the promiscuous lifestyle that is devastating so many of them. This is an answer, given that the main cause of the homosexual "health crisis" is a lack of responsibility in sexual behavior. The best "proposal" to stop promiscuity is to act responsibly. Sullivan should listen to Larry Kramer, the founder of ACT UP: "We brought AIDS upon ourselves by a way of living that welcomed it. You cannot f--- indiscriminately with multiple partners, who are also doing the same, without spreading disease.... We have made sex the cornerstone of gay liberation and gay culture, and it has killed us."

Sullivan criticizes me for opposing same-sex marriage, which, he writes with certainty, would "foster gay monogamy." But when asked by the *Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review* if he believes legalizing gay marriage would lead to more stable and monogamous relationships, Sullivan answered, "I don't know. No one knows what the cultural consequences of this change would be."

Sullivan also accuses me of bigotry because I oppose the increasingly aggressive homosexual-rights agenda—most especially because I oppose same-sex marriage. But replace "gay men" with "polygamists" (a much more widely accepted practice in the world) and Sullivan becomes far less "tolerant." He considers polygamy "immoral." Sullivan has asserted elsewhere that (I'm not kidding) polygamy is an "activity" and homosexuality is a "state," and that, well, "almost everyone" accepts that homosexuality "occupies a deeper level of human consciousness than a polygamous impulse."

Would Sullivan oppose granting three men, or two brothers, the "right" to marry, even if it was consensual and they were in love with one another? If so, it turns out that (to use Sullivan's formulation) the incentives he believes are essential for one segment of the society are to be ruled out of bounds for others. What (coherent) arguments would Sullivan invoke against any arbitrary marital arrangement? Morality? Tradition? Religion? The time-honored definition of the family? These are the very pillars he must destroy in order to make his case for same-sex marriage.

By invoking subjectivism and sexual relativism in his advocacy of homosexual marriage, Sullivan has effectively lost the capacity to draw lines and argue moral distinctions.

WILLIAM J. BENNETT
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

My finding about the abbreviated life span of homosexuals is not perfect. But (as with my study showing a correlation between homosexuality and child molestation) both my methods and my conclusions on the gay life span passed through scientific peer review. In short, my research meets the evidentiary standard of science and the federal court system.

I sampled over 6,500 obituaries in 18 different homosexual journals. Sullivan was a tad dishonest when he said, "As any student of these papers knows, the obit sections—which scarcely existed before AIDS—are primarily ways to commemorate openly gay people who have died early deaths." Not only were many old homosexuals' deaths recorded in these obits, but a considerable number of deaths of gays who were married to women were also recorded.

I also reviewed a large number of studies of those engaging in homosexuality going back to 1858 and found a similar paucity of old homosexuals in just about every such study.

Additional supportive information about my findings can be found in the University of Chicago's "definitive" sex survey of Americans. While 2.9 percent of men aged 18–29 and 4.2 percent of men aged 30–39 claimed that they were bisexual or homosexual, for those aged 40–49 the proportion declined to 2.2 percent, and for those 50–59 it declined to 0.5 percent. Another study found that 75 percent of gays in Colorado who got HIV tests were aged 39 or younger and only one percent of gays getting tested were old.

Why do so few old gays show up in these studies? The answer seems to be because not very many gays become old.

Sullivan also makes many misrepresentations of my work: No study of mine has ever reported that twelve percent of men have attempted or committed "murder." I was not "expelled" from the American Psychological Association. Nor have I interviewed 34 serial killers! The invention of such "facts" smacks of the very dishonesty and lack of scholarship Sullivan wants to accuse me of.

PAUL CAMERON
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Andrew Sullivan replies:

I am delighted that Bill Bennett has now publicly retracted a statistic he freely trumpeted on network television and in *The Weekly Standard*. I am also delighted by his concern about the devastation HIV has wrought among gay men. But the claim he made is not that HIV reduced gay men's life span (who has ever disputed that?) but that homosexuality did. There is no evidence for that whatsoever.

As to his assertion that I do not believe that equal marriage rights would reduce

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promiscuity, he quotes me out of context. I was replying to a question which asked me to predict what would happen to gay-male culture if marriage were made available. I said, honestly, that without a crystal ball I didn't know. But as I clearly stated a few sentences later, "All societies need social institutions to encourage certain beneficial behaviors.... I think that we are, as human beings... happier and better and deeper people in that sort of stable, emotional commitment."

Bennett then brings up the red herring of polygamy. He seems to find it hilarious that I would make a distinction between the condition of homosexuality and the activity of polygamy. It seems simple enough to me. Polygamy is a choice; homosexuality is not. There are solid, moral reasons to oppose polygamy—its abuse of women, its trivialization of a relationship that cannot be divided up among more than two people, etc.—that do not apply to a monogamous, loving homosexual relationship. This is not moral relativism; it is moral argument. I direct Bennett's attention to the recent U.S. Catholic Bishops' letter "Always Our Children," where the bishops describe homosexual orientation as "experienced as a given, not as something freely chosen," and a homosexual child as "a gift of God." Would they use such language about a polygamist?

As for Bennett's friend, Paul Cameron, he seems to believe that because gay men in older generations tend to be more closeted and therefore reluctant to show up in skewed studies, they must be dead! His other points are equally fallacious. His 1989 *Psychological Reports* study "Effect of Homosexuality Upon Public Health and Social Order" clearly claims that twelve percent of heterosexual men admitted to having "tried to/did kill another" person.

As *The Advocate* reported in 1985, after the American Psychological Association began an ethics investigation of Cameron, he attempted to resign from the organization. However, APA bylaws prohibit resignations from members while they are under investigation.

Subsequently, the APA dropped Cameron from its membership after he refused to cooperate with the ethics committee. Neither Mark Pietrzyk nor I claimed that Cameron interviewed serial killers—merely that some of his statistics were "based on interviews with 34 serial killers" conducted by other researchers which Cameron then used to concoct a set of statistics about the alleged murderous tendencies of homosexuals.

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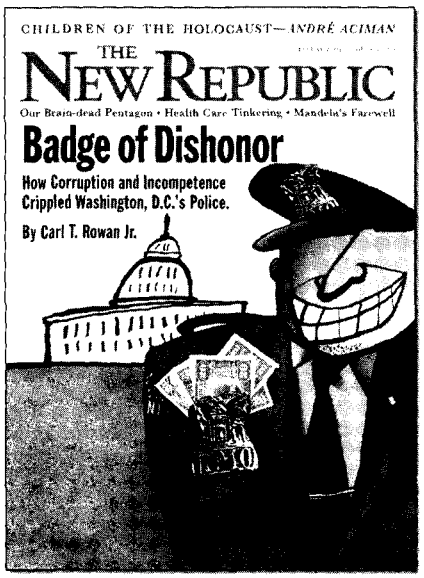
Selective history

To the editors:

If outrageous is not too strong a word to use to describe what the Church did by "kidnapping" a Jewish child who had been baptized, what word should we use to describe André Aciman's attempt to slam Catholicism in general because of a tragic nineteenth century incident ("Innocence and Experience," January 19)? Unlike David Kertzer, the author of the book on Edgardo Mortara, Aciman


CHILDREN OF THE HOLOCAUST—ANDRÉ ACIMAN
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Our Brain-dead Pentagon • Health Care Tinkering • Mandela's Farewell
Badge of Dishonor
How Corruption and Incompetence Crippled Washington, D.C.'s Police.
By Carl T. Rowan Jr.

can't resist making sweeping indictments of Roman Catholicism. Try this with any other subject—generalizing from the few to the collective—and the word is called bigotry.

Snide comments by Aciman like "the boy's nanny had sprinkled some water on [Mortara] when his parents were not looking" reveal Aciman's animus. Readers would never know that the boy's nanny had "baptized" him because she believed he was dying, or that it wasn't until after the boy had recovered that he was removed from parental control. But what does it matter to those who use a book review as a pretext for venting?

WILLIAM A. DONOHUE
President, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights
New York, New York

André Aciman replies:

I do not wish to slam Catholicism; but if it is outrageous to take issue with a religious institution and its infallible man at the helm who sat on his hands for eleven years because he couldn't, or refused to decide whether to return a Jewish child to his rightful Jewish parents on the pretext that the child had been "baptized"—which makes it right, I suppose!—then, yes, I'll slam Catholicism.

Donohue puts quotation marks around the word kidnapping as if the "kidnapping" were a matter of opinion. He would much rather have us think that the Papal police were kind enough to wait for the boy to recover from his sickness before he was "removed from parental control." He would do well to remember that the Church's record vis-à-vis Jews both before and after the Mortara Case—to say nothing of its behavior during the turbulent early '40s—was, to put it mildly and with perfect levelheadedness, outrageously shameful. No one needs a book review to vent anything on that score. The record speaks for itself.

New York intellectuals

To the editors:

I share Stanley Kauffmann's sweet regard for Irving Howe, but in his discussion of the film *Arguing the World*—about Howe, Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, and myself—he oversimplifies a set of complex relationships ("New York Jews," January 19). He writes, "Anyone who knows anything about them recognizes that the lineup is three against one ... the first three moved rightward, Kristol the furthest, [and] Howe ... all his life stood by democratic socialism." Not so.

At City College, both Howe and Kristol were Trotskyists, and Glazer and I were anti-Trotskyists—so that is two against two. Howe was not then a democratic socialist, and he remained a Trotskyist longer than anyone in the *Partisan Review* circle or our generational cohort.

But I am not clear what such terms as right and left mean. I have long believed that in judging people, temperament is as important as ideology—not just the ideas held by individuals but the way they are held. In his early years, Howe was a commissar and, as Michael Walzer remarked in the film, sometimes a brutal debater. In later years, Howe's temperament changed quite markedly, and we became friends. For more than seven years, I contributed regularly to his magazine *Dissent*, stopping two years ago for personal reasons.

Because of temperament, I have retained my regard for Irving Kristol, for his wit and charm, though we have differed strongly in our political views. As for my own views, I described myself in the film as a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture. Is that left or right?

DANIEL BELL
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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FROM WASHINGTON

Who cares?

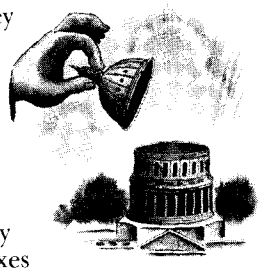
Despite its hefty $21.7 billion price tag, President Clinton's ambitious child care proposal seemed incontestable when he introduced it last month. Here, after all, was a plan that sought to help both the working poor, by giving them child care subsidies, and the middle class, by offering them tax breaks on child care expenses. Surely Republicans would not dare oppose an idea geared toward children and one that so strongly appealed to women during an election year.

But the right soon found a way out of Clinton's clever trap. The Clinton plan offers no benefits to parents who stay home with their kids rather than work; conservatives seized on this, and cited it as proof that the president's plan was antifamily. "Some fundamental questions need to be asked about the importance of the mother–child attachment, particularly in the very early months and years," Senator Daniel Coats, a Republican from Indiana, told *The Washington Post*. "Do we want to encourage the kind of child care the president is encouraging?" Soon, a group of moderate Senate Republicans led by Rhode Island's John Chafee introduced an alternative that—unlike the president's proposal—promised tax benefits for all families, even when one parent stays home.

What rich irony. Not so long ago, conservatives were braying about how we need to force lazy stay-at-home welfare mothers to get jobs. What's more, not one Republican senator has endorsed a proposal by Connecticut Democrat Christopher Dodd to extend the Family and Medical Leave Act to companies with at least 25 employees. Apparently, it's important to make sure parents stay home for three years but not for twelve weeks.

Yet putting such contradictions aside, there's a strong element of truth in what the conservatives are saying. For too long, the contentious debate over whether working mothers are bad mothers has overshadowed the equally important question of whether children need more attention from mothers *and* fathers, and whether government can do something to make that happen. If conservatives were really interested in expanding the Clinton plan and making it a universal child care program that offered financial assistance to all needy parents of young children—doing, in essence, what some European nations have done for years—their effort would not only be credible. It would be laudable.

Trouble is, providing such universal assistance gets very expensive, and—surprise!—the conservatives don't really want to spend the money. To finance the kind of tax relief Republicans are talking about—without sacrificing elements of the Clinton plan that would improve day care quality—it would cost well in excess of Clinton's $22 billion over five years, which the Republicans have already said is more than they can stomach. (The Chafee plan, by contrast, costs just $11 billion.) And if the idea is to help low-income families as well, the tax credit would have to be refundable—meaning you could collect the money as a subsidy if you were too poor to pay taxes in the first place. But Republicans say they're not interested in refundable credits, either, because of the cost. In short, conservatives want it both ways. They don't wish to penalize at-home mothers, but they're also unwilling to spend what it would take to give substantial child care assistance to everyone who needs it. How fair is that?



Of course, conservatives who oppose the Clinton plan deny any such ploys. "I understand there are budgetary constraints, but why don't we look at spending a similar amount of dollars and benefiting everybody?" asks a reasonable-sounding Amy Myers of the Family Research Council. It's a fair question, but it's one conservatives might want to ask Republican lawmakers first. After all, the Chafee plan doesn't benefit "everybody" any more than the president's. In fact, it conspicuously skimps on benefits for the one group—the working poor—who arguably need it most.

Here's why. Although Chafee magnanimously proposes an increase in the child care block grant, which directly subsidizes child care for the poor (who, again, don't benefit from nonrefundable tax credits), his increase is less generous than Clinton's—$5 billion instead of $7.5 billion. More importantly, the increase comes solely from discretionary funds. Unlike mandatory spending, which Clinton uses in his plan and essentially turns a program into an entitlement, discretionary money must be approved during the appropriations process, even after it's authorized in the budget. In other words, every year Congress would have to sit down and hash out funding levels all over again. Given the general reluctance of a Republican-controlled Congress to shift vast amounts of money from, say, corporate welfare to child care, it seems unlikely that all or even most of the subsidies in Chafee's bill would ever materialize. (Indeed, if all the Republicans really wanted was to universalize child care, they'd endorse an even more ambitious plan from Dodd. His preserves the essentials of the president's plan but also extends modest tax relief to at-home parents. Of course, it costs $30 billion.)

As part of their child care push, Republicans have also been promoting reform of laws governing flexible work hours. This is a sensible impulse, helping many middle-income parents rearrange their schedules to accommodate children. But most such proposals also make it easier for companies to avoid paying overtime. This tends to hurt—you guessed it—low-income Americans, who frequently rely on overtime pay simply to make rent and buy food.

It's possible to imagine a grand compromise—a bargain that would spread equal benefits to parents who work and parents who don't, one that would help families at all income levels and one that would do it all for a reasonable price. But when you divide the money among that many people, you have to wonder, just how much good is it doing? The fact is, a few extra hundred dollars given out to every parent is unlikely to enable many people to give up their jobs altogether. But if we target the assistance to parents who are working—parents who, in most cases, don't have much choice—each parent might receive enough money to offset the cost of child care enough to work fewer hours (and spend more time with their kids). As for those who couldn't reduce their hours, they might at least afford better care. "I don't want to turn this into a mommy war between those who want to stay at home and those who don't have a choice," says Dodd. "If you're fortunate enough that you can make that choice, you shouldn't be trying to deprive someone who has no such choice."

This is, of course, a politically hazardous argument to make: The role of women in the workplace is an issue about which Americans still feel profoundly ambivalent. But, as conservatives are so fond of arguing, when it comes to children, good policy should always trump good politics. And all things considered, Clinton's plan is pretty good policy.

JONATHAN COHN

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

FEBRUARY 23, 1998

SMOKE SIGNALS

President Clinton has received almost nothing but plaudits for the budget he sent to Congress last week. Banner headlines heralded its arrival: "FIRST BALANCED FEDERAL BUDGET IN 30 YEARS OFFERED BY CLINTON" trumpeted *The Washington Post*; "SPENDING INITIATIVES SHAPED TO BENEFIT CHILDREN" declared *The New York Times*. Normally sober-minded number crunchers were quick to offer their bubbly assessments. "It's a hat trick," gushed former Congressional Budget Office Director Robert Reischauer. "Good policy, good politics, and good economics."

The fanfare may be deserved. On its face, at least, Clinton's budget is indeed a master stroke. On the policy front, Clinton has firmly seized the initiative from antigovernment Republicans and has laid the groundwork for a sensible, activist government: one that will help parents obtain good, affordable day care and create classrooms to effectively educate their children. On the economic front, Clinton will put the federal government in the black for the first time in three decades. And, better yet, he's vowed to use the surplus not to cut taxes, as Republicans would like, but to bolster Social Security.

It is on the politics front, however, that Clinton may have outdone himself. His decision to fund his slate of social programs with $65.5 billion from a proposed settlement with the tobacco industry, plus $24 billion from closing tax loopholes and ending tax breaks for powerful interest groups, has been hailed as one of the shrewdest political calculations of his presidency. Clinton, it seems, has put himself in a win-win situation and put Republicans in a double bind. If the Republican-controlled Congress refuses to pass the tobacco legislation and doesn't acquiesce in Clinton's plan to tighten the tax code, it will have to kill Clinton's social programs. Then, Democrats will have a potent argument on which to campaign in the 1998 House and Senate elections: namely, that Republicans care more for cancer-causing tobacco companies and the wealthy than they do for cancer patients and children. And if Republicans do give in to Clinton on both the tobacco settlement and the tax loopholes, which they have fought hard to keep open in the past, Clinton will not only have won on those fronts, but he will also have pushed through his ambitious social agenda.

But what will happen if Republicans somehow manage to make a politically palatable argument against going along with the tobacco legislation and the tax-code tightening, and the public demands that Clinton's social programs be funded from the budget surplus instead? To be sure, Republicans would rather use the surplus for tax cuts, but the clamor for Clinton's well-tailored, poll-tested social programs may be impossible to ignore—they are, after all, well-tailored and poll-tested. Will the long-term interests of the Social Security trust fund take precedence over the more immediate needs of children and the environment? At the very least, the choice facing legislators—and Clinton—will no longer be so easy.

Thus, Clinton's decision to set forth his most ambitious social-spending proposal since his ill-fated health care plan is hardly risk-free. Sure, Clinton may hit the legislative trifecta of tobacco legislation, a tighter tax code, and increased social spending. But by linking his social programs to heretofore unrealized tobacco legislation and to closing tax loopholes, Clinton is not only putting all his eggs in one basket, he is also setting himself up to violate his own promise to set aside any surplus to shore up Social Security. (Indeed, his own advisers are already laying the groundwork for a retreat.) All pledges of self-restraint aside, it's already going to be hard for politicians to resist dipping into the surplus money pot. And by whetting the public's appetite for a host of popular social programs without coming up with a fail-safe way to pay for them, Clinton is, to some degree, tempting fate.

Furthermore, if he's not careful, Clinton's political strategy might strengthen the tobacco industry's hand in negotiations over the proposed settlement. If Congress feels undue pressure to pass tobacco legislation, it may be more willing to give in to big tobacco's demands for a less onerous settlement. And the settlement itself—which tobacco companies, incidentally, have been lobbying Congress to approve—is by no means an undisputed good thing. In exchange for paying billions of dollars to the government, the industry gets immunity from future class action lawsuits. This is not the type of deal that should be negotiated under self-imposed political pressure. •

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NOTEBOOK

UNDETERRED: The Israelis are once again lining up to get their standard-issue gas masks. No one else in the Middle East feels compelled to have such protective gear ready at hand, not the Saudis and not even the Kuwaitis. Yes, Saddam Hussein poses a long-term threat to *all* his neighbors. And they are all foolhardy to try to pretend he doesn't. Still, the only country to which he and his macabre weapons are an immediate threat is Israel. If the political culture of Iraq weren't so feverish, the Jewish state would be thought to possess a plausible deterrent. But the political culture of Iraq is, in fact, more feverish than the etiquette of journalism permits us to say. So Israel's deterrent may not deter, in which case Israel's deterrent will punish instead. But this will not be consolation to the citizens of Tel Aviv. Thus, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright chose a curious moment to scold Israel, the moment when the failure of her administration's Iraq policy was most palpably on every Israeli's mind. For once—let's admit it—she was not scolding Israel (or blaming Israel) for the disintegration of the fragile old Gulf war coalition with a few Arab states against Saddam. She was scolding Israel for the torpor of the peace process. But the torpor in the peace process, at least that small part of it for which Israel is responsible, has a lot to do with Iraq. Iraq has been enmeshed in every war Israel has ever fought. In 1948, in 1967, in 1973 (and in symbolic ways also during the 1956 Suez conflict), Iraq sent what was on each occasion roughly a third of its military might to engage the Israelis. All of these events took place before the advent of Saddam. No Israeli–Palestinian settlement would appease Iraq, and certainly not Saddam's Iraq. Quite the contrary: Saddam would see such a development as a chance to outflank Arafat in his devotion to the cause of Arab Palestine and to pull the old man once again into his own tent, a place where the chairman feels comfortable in any case. This imperils Jordan, half of whose population is Palestinian and across whose deserts Saddam would dispatch his tanks and then his missiles, carriers of lethal chemicals and the biology of mass death, ready to push forward over the Jordan River, cheered by Arafat's countrymen. If Israel were not, then and there, poised on the river, what and who could repel such an assault to save the one abiding friend the U.S. has among the Arabs, King Hussein? Moreover, who would defend Israel itself? Secretary Albright and her slightly gullible retinue have been instructing Israel to give up this piece of land and then that piece of land—in exchange for what are basically mere vapors. It is now time for the peace processors to tell Arafat what pieces of land he must give up all hope of having, and these are the lands which Israel will need, for the foreseeable future, to envision as its first line of defense.

LETHAL INFLECTION: The execution of murderer Karla Faye Tucker does not bode well for the death penalty. But not because, as *The New York Times* speculated last week, it heralds a growing opposition to the death penalty on the religious right. After all, most religious conservatives deny that their sympathy for the born-again Tucker will have any impact on their support for capital punishment. No, Tucker's lethal injection should weaken the death penalty for a different reason—because it proves that support for the death penalty is based on emotion, not reason. And biased emotion at that. Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell say they pleaded for Tucker's life because she found religion and repented. But lots of people on death row find religion and repent, and Falwell and Robertson don't plead for them. The secret of Tucker's political appeal was that once she found religion and repented, she *looked like them*: middle-aged, white, Southern, evangelical—probably the demographic of the average "700 Club" viewer. How likely are Robertson and Falwell to buck their movement's death-penalty hawks the next time a black man on death row finds Allah?

LASHING BACK: Most feminists have been conspicuously circumspect about the latest Clinton sex scandal, reasoning that it is better to remain silent and be thought a hypocrite than to speak and remove all doubt. But Susan Faludi frowns on such passivity. Not content to help the president merely by sparing him her moral censure, Faludi has actually mounted a vigorous defense of Clinton. In a *New York Observer* article, Faludi declares that the real divide over President Clinton's various alleged assignations is not between men and women. Rather, "the critical split is the one between girls and grown-ups." In Faludi's estimation, the president's alleged paramours—Gennifer Flowers, Paula Jones, and Monica Lewinsky, the latter "young and naïve, but ... legally well into adulthood"—are mere "girls," whose only power is derived from "having a sulk 'n' sob in front of the adults." Hillary Clinton, by contrast, is an adult, who may be hurt by her husband's alleged infidelities but "isn't sharing it with every daddy figure on television." According to Faludi, Hillary embodies feminism, because feminism is really "about seeing what happened to you in proportion, and about knowing when the public good outweighs your having a temper tantrum over a personal offense." And we thought that the personal was always political.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR: We are very, very delighted to announce the publication of Fouad Ajami's *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (Pantheon), a study of the agony of modernity in the Arab world as it shaped the lives and the works of a number of twentieth century Arab intellectuals and writers. Its remarkable mixture of the analytical and the lyrical will be instantly recognizable to readers of these pages, to which Ajami is a contributing editor. •

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ON THE HILL

SUPPORT GROUP

By Hanna Rosin

On the morning of the State of the Union address, the papers promised an awkward affair. Members of Congress would shy away from usually coveted aisle seats, leaving the president to slink away, shamefaced with his hands in his pockets, a national leper. But that prognosis overlooked the president's newest cheerleaders: the Congressional Black Caucus.

At ten o'clock that morning, Sheila Jackson Lee from Texas got to the floor, signed up for two aisle seats, and gave one to Eddie Bernice Johnson, also from Texas. Johnson's friend Corrine Brown from Florida then joined them, followed by Cynthia McKinney from Georgia and Carrie Meek from Florida. In their midst sat a few other black congressmen—Jesse Jackson Jr., Elijah Cummings, and John Lewis. Huddled together like a clique in a Princeton eating club, they jumped up and clutched President Clinton with both hands as he walked down the aisle. When the speech began they reacted on cue to each of his strategic pauses—"Raise the minimum wage," "One hundred thousand new teachers," "school-construction tax cut"—whooping and cheering, first and loudest, with an enthusiasm that infected the crowd around them.

While most Democrats were still defending Clinton in guarded legalese, and feminists were still keeping awkwardly silent, blacks in Congress were fiercely protective. They defended him not as distant observers or savvy partisans, but as co-conspirators—coaches in a dirty wrestling match. "Bill Clinton is a fighter," Maxine Waters of California said after the State of the Union. "You back him against the wall and he comes out fighting." Charles Rangel of New York got in the gutter for him, calling Monica Lewinsky a "poor child" with "emotional problems" who was not playing "with a full deck." ("Did you see how he handled that rough situation?" Rangel said proudly.)

As it happens, the black representatives were right to defend him, if right means being in sync with their constituents. Black support for Clinton after the scandal has been nearly universal; over 85 percent of African Americans approve of Clinton and think he has the honesty and integrity to do his job, compared to 63 percent of whites, according to a *Washington Post* poll. Three quarters of African Americans dismiss the allegations against him as unimportant.

What can explain this rousing support? The standard line is that the Congressional Black Caucus expects payback: Now Clinton won't be able to shut out black priorities in this budget round like he did in the last one. There is only one problem with this analysis: There is no daylight between Clinton and the CBC, anyway. Well before the fight with Republicans even began, Clinton embraced many of the CBC's top priorities in his budget cut—empowerment zones, a school-construction tax cut, aid for Africa. Instead of drafting an alternative budget, as they usually do, CBC members, "ecstatic for the first time in years" as one put it, spent last week drafting talking points instructing members on how to support the president's bill.

What black representatives feel for Clinton is a deeper affinity impervious to his political wavering and soldered by his latest troubles. Black leaders often compare Clinton to Bobby Kennedy or Abraham Lincoln, but in his moment of crisis the president was elevated to even higher ground. "You mention Dr. King," Rangel said to the Rev. Jesse Jackson in a TV interview. "Didn't they really do the same thing to [him]? Didn't the FBI really try to tape and get people to make accusations against him and destroy him?" They see not the man who cut welfare benefits but rather a brother in sorrow, the sympathetic son of a single mother. "He didn't grow up with a silver spoon," says Johnson. "He's not programmed to be president. He doesn't follow the script." There was even a joke circulating that "it sounds like Bill Clinton is black, the way he's being attacked," says Donna Brazile, chief of staff to Eleanor Holmes Norton.

As an honorary black man, Clinton has inherited the status of a conspiracy victim. Brazile says the turning point came after Hillary Clinton's "vast conspiracy" speech: "People started calling the office and saying Clinton has the same enemies we do." Julianne Malveaux, who hosts a weekly black radio show in New York, says her callers started lumping him with casualties like Hazel O'Leary and Mike Espy. Some said he went down defending them. "The attitude is, he appointed all those black people so of course they're going after him," says Malveaux. A Houston host says his callers substituted Clinton for O.J.; now the host spends his days bleeping out curses against Monica, the new Nicole Brown.

Conspiracy theories coexist with compassionate realism. For some, Clinton stars in a narrative of redemption, much like Marion Barry, where he is forgiven though never pronounced guilty. "Dr. King used to say the purpose of his movement was to redeem the soul of America," says Lewis. "We will not cast him out and throw him overboard. We will not run away from you; we will run towards you." Lewis recalls how, when he was growing up in rural Alabama, an unmarried woman who got pregnant would be placed in front of the congregation, and without judgment she would "in a weird sense confess the sin" and be forgiven. Like Robert Duval's very Clintonian character in the new movie *The Apostle*, a man with "wandering eyes and wicked, wicked ways," the president would find his redemption in the tears of a black

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churchgoing woman, who whispers "that's all right" without ever knowing the sin. In the end, "the ordeal will make him stronger," says Lewis.

Sadly for Clinton, Lewis's style of absolution is a dying art. While Jesse Jackson was running to man the White House defenses, his son Jesse Jr. was guarding against being duped. Publicly, Jesse Jr. takes the standard wait-for-the-facts approach. But privately, his staff trots out all the sore points: Ricky Ray Rector, Sister Souljah, his outings at segregated golf courses. Unclouded by nostalgia over shanty churches, their memories are keen. And unlike their fathers, patience is not their virtue. •

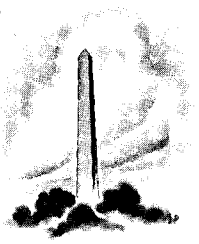
WASHINGTON SCENE

PLOTTERS

By Stephen Glass

When Hillary Clinton started ranting last week, about a "vast right-wing conspiracy," Beltway pundits could barely suppress their snickers. The first lady seemed to be implying that somewhere in America there is a committee of middle-aged white men who regularly get together, hunch around a long oval table, and feverishly plot to undermine the Clinton administration. Does Mrs. Clinton really believe this malarkey? Does anyone?

Actually, I do. Last Sunday, just such a meeting took place, and I was there. It was the monthly gathering of the Commission to Restore the Presidency to Greatness, or CRPG, and the scene unfolded exactly as the first lady might have expected. The clandestine rendezvous took place in Northern Virginia at the rural home of software developer R. Theodore Curtis. The attendees were all middle-aged white men dressed in sober ties and starched dress shirts. Most had receding hairlines. Sitting on the table in front of each man was a namecard listing his title and area of responsibility: "Vice President for Vince Foster's Death Affairs," "Special Counsel to Investigate Filegate," "Deputy Inspector for Arkansas Issues," and so on.



The gathering began, as all good board meetings do, with reports from the officers. One by one, the members of the group detailed their latest findings. Many made use of charts or diagrams, outlining things like the position of Foster's head relative to his bullet wound. Some brandished what appeared to be form letters from congressional staffers responding to their inquiries.

Eventually, Senior Deputy Michael V. Housman got his turn to speak. His speciality is the hitherto unpublicized theory that Bill Clinton is really a woman—the lesbian lover of the first lady. Housman proposed that the group organize a press event to publicize his hypothesis. But though he was once a respected member of the group, Housman's standing has been rather low ever since the failure of his prediction that "Wilma Clinton," as he calls the president, would come out of the closet on "Ellen." So Curtis quickly dismissed Housman's p.r. proposal, saying it would strain the group's credibility.

Curtis then opened the floor to new business. This is what everybody had been waiting for, and within moments the table exploded into a heated discussion about Monica Lewinsky. Surprisingly, not everybody was entirely happy about the scandal. Brian Goldin, Curtis's top lieutenant, warned that the Lewinsky affair could pit feminists against the president—and certainly the group would not want to be aligned with feminists, who, after all, are even more dangerous to America than the Clinton presidency. Others worried about getting too involved in a story so centered on oral sex, which violates their Christian beliefs, while still others seized on that problem to propose a new initiative—a concerted campaign to fix the Communications Decency Act in order to keep public discussion of sex to a minimum.

Eventually, Curtis brokered a sensible compromise: The group would hold a rally on the Mall, with no discussion of oral sex whatsoever. Sensing another opportunity to make his case, Housman proposed merging this rally with an event publicizing his Clinton-is-really-a-lesbian theory. All the demonstrators, Housman suggested, could wear skirts, or "something else feminine." Curtis warned Housman that one more mention of lesbian theories or drag rallies and he would be ejected from the group.

The Lewinsky scandal represents an important step in CRPG's evolution—perhaps the most important in its two-year history. The group has taken off in the last six months after the most powerful anti-Clinton group, the Clinton Investigative Commission, failed to turn up hard evidence that Ron Brown, the late commerce secretary, was murdered. Although CIC gained national notoriety and still runs a popular website (www.impeachclinton.org), Curtis and several colleagues became convinced that CIC was surreptitiously under the control of—yes!—Clinton allies. "It's really Clinton's most ingenious plan of all," he explained to me. "By funding your own opponents, you can make sure they never quite hit bone, just flesh wounds. People think there's an opposition when there's not. That's the real reason why none of the scandals have quite stuck."

But now that Curtis's new group had its big chance to step out from under CIC's shadow, would it make good? While the Washington Monument rally got off to a slow start on Monday—only a dozen or so members showed up to sing "The Star Spangled Banner" and wave signs that read "Impeach Now" and "Sing Monica. Sing the Truth"—throngs of counter-demonstrators soon emerged. This was an impressive feat,

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really, given that predemonstration publicity was practically nonexistent. And yet the Clinton supporters seemed surprisingly friendly toward the protesters. In fact, at one point, at least one demonstrator switched sides. Sensing a deception—know-it-all Beltway-types like me can smell chicanery from miles away—I asked Curtis whether, in fact, the counter-demonstrators were actually members of his group, too. He insisted that was not the case, but when I pointed out that one of the new Clinton supporters had forgotten to take the "I believe Monica" button off his shirt, Curtis turned beet red and started shouting at the demonstrators. "Stop. Stop. Stop. I told you all not to switch around," he screamed over their singing. "I just got tired of being pro-Clinton," one of the turncoats sheepishly replied. "I want to be on the fun side sometimes."

It turns out that the CRPG stages both sides of their rallies when their opponents don't show up. It's not a bad way to exaggerate strength and media attention, actually—I used to work at a pro-choice group that did the same thing. But it also makes it awfully hard to fathom that these conspirators could be behind such a complicated scandal as Monicagate. Of course, maybe that's just what they wanted me to think. •

The media's struggle against sex addiction.

SCANDALIZED

By Timothy Noah

You have to be nimble to make it as a press critic. During the first week of the Monica Lewinsky uproar, the rap on the Washington press corps was that it had let itself be scooped by right-wing cybergossip Matt Drudge. By the second week, the rap was that mainstream reporters were running with the same sort of lurid-but-not-completely-confirmed details (a semen-stained dress that probably doesn't exist, a Secret Service agent who may or may not have witnessed West Wing pleasuring) that get printed by, well, Matt Drudge. Even Jonah Goldberg, who helped tip off *Newsweek* to the existence of the now famous Lewinsky tapes (the crucial meeting between his mother, agent Lucianne Goldberg, Linda Tripp, and *Newsweek*'s Michael Isikoff took place in Jonah's house) has now turned up in *The New Yorker* as a press scourge, mocking attempts by reporters at *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and ABC to manipulate him and his mother into turning over the tapes. For shame!

The press's confusion about whether it is pursuing the issue of Bill Clinton's sex life too vigorously or not vigorously enough mirrors an argument between Clinton-defenders and Clinton-haters that's been going on since 1992. The shame-on-you school is pro-Clinton and led by Democratic consultant James Carville. Its central tenet is that the press, egged on by a network of conservative activists and "cash for trash" tabloids, has developed an insatiable and unwholesome appetite for smutty stories about the president's alleged sexual misbehavior. "People are going to be repulsed by this," Carville said on the January 25 edition of NBC's "Meet The Press."

Opposing this view is the stop-protecting-him school, which is anti-Clinton and led by R. Emmett Tyrrell, the rabidly conservative editor-in-chief of *The American Spectator*. Its basic contention is that reporters have steered clear of Clinton scandal stories because they have been conned by the president. "He's one of the great seducers of the western world," says Tyrrell (the coauthor of a novel called *The Impeachment of William Jefferson Clinton*). "It's not surprising that he would seduce the American press."

There are, of course, basic problems with both views. The shame-on-you argument doesn't explain why the media's interest in Clinton's alleged sexual exploits has been so intermittent. Four years ago, for example, *The Washington Post* (which two weeks ago broke the Lewinsky story in the mainstream press) mocked a Paula Jones press conference as "yet another ascension of Mount Bimbo." *Newsweek*'s Evan Thomas, now at the forefront of the magazine's aggressive Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky coverage, initially felt it safe to dismiss Jones as "some sleazy woman with big hair coming out of the trailer parks." This hardly suggests a press corps obsessed with Bill Clinton's secretions.

The stop-protecting-him argument, on the other hand, totally fails to explain why, since the Lewinsky story came to light, the press has lent so little credence to Clinton's increasingly forceful denials that he ever had a sexual relationship with Lewinsky. The last of these, a finger-jabbing pronouncement on the eve of the State of the Union address, won plaudits for verisimilitude but not for actual believability. *New York Times* columnist William Safire is practically the only prominent journalist who's said he doubts the sex story is true, and this is mostly out of pique that attention is now being siphoned away from the Clinton fund-raising story that Safire's been mining since 1996. Most other commentators have said, properly, that the truth can't be known until the facts are in, though the intensity of the coverage (the first wave on TV actually exceeded the amount of airtime devoted to Princess Diana's death last summer) gives a strong hint of what news editors believe.

I've devised an explanation of the press's coverage of the Clinton sex story that synthesizes elements from both the Carville and Tyrrell schools while discarding their shakier premises. I call it the Cheever principle, after John Cheever's short story "The World of Apples." In the story, an austere poet stumbles upon a couple making love in the woods. Seized by the image of the man's hairy backside, the poet suddenly finds himself incapable of contemplating the loftier realms; instead, he becomes a compulsive pornographer, scribbling dirty limericks, a

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A Message from Negative Population Growth, Inc.

Immigration Fuels U.S. Population Growth

We at Negative Population Growth, Inc. (NPG) believe that our country is already vastly overpopulated in terms of the long range carrying capacity of its resources and environment.

We believe, therefore, that U.S. population growth should be halted as soon as possible, and eventually reversed.

But, unless our present massive immigration is drastically reduced, we will never be able to stabilize our population at a sustainable level.

In the decade of the 80s we grew by some 25 million. Immigration, both legal and illegal, accounted for about 40 percent of that huge increase in our numbers. Projections are that we will grow by at least as much in the 90s.

If present rates of fertility and immigration continue, our population, now over 269 million, will pass 400 million shortly after 2050, with no end to growth in sight! Such growth would be catastrophic both for our environment, and for our standard of living.

We need to reduce immigration to the level of emigration (out-migration) so that immigration will no longer contribute to our population growth. That would require halting illegal immigration, and reducing legal immigration to a comprehensive ceiling of 100,000 a year, including all relatives and refugees.

We now allow more than 900,000 legal immigrants to come here each year. Their numbers are swelled by over 300,000 illegal immigrants.

Advocates of Massive Immigration are Wrong!

There are powerful forces that fight not only to keep immigration at the present high level, but to increase it. Among them are employers who want low-wage labor, ethnic groups whose leaders seek greater political power, and some humanitarians who believe in virtually open borders.

They also include pro-growth advocates who believe that an ever-growing labor force, fueled by immigration, is necessary to achieve their goal of an ever-increasing GNP. That goal, in the real world of environmental and resource limits, is a recipe for disaster.

How Can We Best Help Others?

Beyond any question, the United States should maintain the humane policies toward immigrants and refugees that have characterized its past.

But we need to express our compassion in an intelligent way. Our priority should be to improve living conditions in the developing countries, rather than to allow vast numbers of their citizens to settle here.

World population is growing by nearly 90 million a year, and almost all of that growth occurs in the developing countries. We cannot possibly allow more than a tiny fraction of those millions to come here. What can we do to help all those who have no choice but to remain at home?

One thing is crystal clear. The problem of the underdeveloped countries are beyond solution by emigration. To pretend otherwise is simply self-delusion.

Nothing can permanently improve living conditions in these countries unless they first halt their population growth, the root cause of their poverty and environmental degradation.

Those who assert that eradicating poverty is a prerequisite for halting population growth have the process just backwards. Only after halting their population growth can developing countries even begin to bring their standard of living up to an adequate level.

We should spare no effort or expense to help those nations that are prepared to make a determined effort to halt, and eventually to reverse, their population growth.

We Need A Sensible U.S. Immigration Policy

We cannot continue to allow our national immigration policy to be dictated by special interest groups who pursue their own agendas without regard for the broad national interest.

Our immigration policy should be an integral part of a national population policy aimed at halting, and then reversing, our population growth, so that U.S. population can eventually be stabilized at a lower, more sustainable level.

As Americans, our first obligation, to ourselves and to our children and grandchildren, is to restore and preserve the land we have inherited. In shaping our immigration policy, our top priority must be our own national interest, and the welfare of present and future generations of Americans.

If you agree that we need to reduce legal immigration, and halt illegal immigration, once and for all, we need your support. NPG is a nonprofit, public interest organization founded in 1972. To become a member, please send us your check today.

Yes! I want to become a member of NPG, and help reduce U.S. immigration to a level compatible with our national interes. I am enclosing a check for annual membership dues:

___ $30 ___ $50 ___ $100 ___ Other

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip ___

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ballad titled "The Fart That Saved Athens," and, finally, nothing but the word "fuck." The poet's mounting despair at his pornographic obsession ends when he makes a pilgrimage to a country church, bathes himself in a cold waterfall, and reconsecrates himself to art.

Admittedly, the analogy with the press coverage of the current scandal isn't perfect. Washington reporters are hardly austere or lyrical, but they do try to focus on more dignified (if not always more important) topics like elections or legislative battles. Moreover, while the sight of a man and a woman copulating in a forest signifies just that, the Lewinsky story encompasses, in addition to pornography, important questions about morality and the law. (Did the president commit perjury, suborn perjury, or obstruct justice in trying to cover up an affair with a White House intern? Is the alleged affair itself so abusive of his office, or of the intern herself, as to disqualify Clinton from serving out his term?)

Like the poet in the story, however, the press does find itself periodically stumbling onto stories that contain fantastically lurid elements. If such a story raises serious questions about Clinton's fitness for high office, the pack goes after it obsessively for a time; the public becomes disgusted with the press; the press becomes disgusted with itself; and eventually a cleansing ritual takes place—usually before the "serious questions" have come close to being fully explored. The cleansing ritual tends to take the form of intense media self-scrutiny like the sort we've been seeing lately.

All media flurries die down sooner or later, of course, as new facts become more scarce, or the public and press become bored with the matter at hand. But the Cheever principle accelerates this process by adding something more potent to the mix: shame. This helps explain why, for example, the 1991 press furor over Clarence Thomas's alleged sexual harassment of Anita Hill (and possible perjury about it before the Senate Judiciary Committee) abated just as other witnesses were coming forward with stories similar to Hill's. Reporters and editors had simply grown weary of doing stories about pubic hairs and Long Dong Silver. I write from experience: At the time, I was a Washington reporter for *The Wall Street Journal* and covered the last day of the Hill–Thomas hearings. Late in that interminable evening, a press aide dropped depositions into my lap from Angela Wright and her friend Rose Jourdain alleging that Thomas had made inappropriate sexual remarks to Wright when she'd worked for him at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. I dutifully phoned in a paragraph near the top of my story about the new evidence. The following day, a *Journal* editor mildly chastised me for putting the phrase "my boobs" (a quote from Wright's deposition) in the paper. I then wrote a longer piece about Wright and her allegations, but with the *Journal*, like the rest of the press now running away from the seamy details as quickly as possible, the story never ran.

The drill was essentially the same in 1992, when Gennifer Flowers was paid by *The Star*, a supermarket tabloid, to tell the story of her alleged affair with Clinton. Few people remember now that the real significance of the story lay in the fact that, after Flowers's alleged affair with then-Arkansas Governor Clinton, she got a $17,524-per-year state job, raising the possibility that Clinton had attempted to buy her silence with taxpayer dollars. (Although there was no evidence that Clinton directly intervened, a state committee appointed to investigate Flowers's hiring had uncovered some evidence that Flowers had benefited from favoritism.) At a press conference, Flowers played tapes of X-rated phone conversations with Clinton that seemed to confirm her allegations, and a full-tilt media frenzy ensued. But the sex angle made the mainstream press so uncomfortable that it quickly backed off after Clinton gave his ambiguous "60 Minutes" interview. In newsrooms, a rationalization quickly evolved: The story was untouchable because Flowers was tainted by "checkbook journalism" and because the tapes might have been faked—even though Clinton by then had apologized to then-New York Governor Mario Cuomo for a derogatory remark about Cuomo that Clinton had made on the tapes. Now, of course, Clinton has reportedly confessed in a deposition in the Paula Jones lawsuit that he did indeed have at least some kind of dalliance with Flowers, making it clear that the issue of Flowers's state job was legitimate.

Then there's the 1994 Paula Jones Troopergate affair. After making an initial splash in *The Los Angeles Times* (as well as in Tyrrell's less reliable *American Spectator*), Jones's story largely disappeared from view well before reporters had completed a thorough examination of her charge that the president had demanded oral sex from her. The media's retreat from the Jones story is more understandable than the retreat from the Thomas and Flowers stories because so many of the Jones elements remain genuinely puzzling. (Even now, I still wonder how someone as eager to ingratiate as Bill Clinton could unzip his pants before a complete stranger and bluntly say, "Kiss it.") Nonetheless, the fact remains that little press scrutiny of Jones's account occurred until Stuart Taylor, a respected writer on legal affairs, wrote a piece in the November 1996 issue of *The American Lawyer* chiding the rest of the media for ignoring evidence that her story might be true.

To field-test the Cheever principle, I called some reporters who have been covering the Lewinsky saga. All of them said the story was about something more important than sex, which it is. But all also acknowledged that, on a human rather than a journalism-seminar level, the more salacious aspects of the story were making them queasy. "You sort of have to take a deep breath and plow into these areas," said Susan Schmidt of *The Washington Post*. "You feel slimed," agreed her *Post* colleague Ruth Marcus. "I hang up the phone after talking to these people, and I generally don't feel good about it," said Gwen Ifill of NBC News. "It makes you uncomfortable at times," says Chris Vlasto, a producer at ABC News. Michael Frisby of *The Wall Street Journal* pointed out that one reason his fellow White House reporters desperately wish the president would volunteer more details about the Lewinsky matter was that "then we wouldn't have to ask those questions."

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The interviews confirmed my belief that these reporters (several of whom I've known for years) are decent people who possess what used to be mocked, but is now mostly praised, as middle-class morality. They insist that their distaste for the story won't prevent them from digging until they get to the bottom of it, and perhaps that's true; certainly the magnitude of the scandal (if the allegations prove true) dwarfs the earlier Clinton sex stories. But in recent days, the story has felt like it's starting to drift away. Judge Susan Webber Wright's ruling steering the Jones attorneys away from Lewinsky prevents them from adding more fuel to the fire and may also make it more difficult for Ken Starr to prosecute Clinton. Meanwhile, public opinion polls put Clinton's popularity higher than ever. Could these developments provide reporters with a rationalization for dropping their pursuit of this discomfiting story before they find out whether Clinton committed perjury, suborned perjury, or obstructed justice? Guilty or innocent, Clinton may find that the press's ambivalence about the whole subject of his sex life is the best thing he has going for him.

TIMOTHY NOAH writes about the media for *U.S. News & World Report.*

Clinton's solid Social Security plan.

PENNY WISE

By Jonathan Chait

Heading into the State of the Union address, President Clinton's policy advisers faced two big problems. (No, not Monica Lewinsky. That came later.) The first problem was that the Social Security trust fund was scheduled to start losing money in 2013 with bankruptcy likely by 2029. The second problem was that the federal budget was on the verge of producing surpluses over the next decade. While this second development might not sound like a problem, the White House worried that Congress would use the surplus to fund tax cuts that would trigger a new wave of red ink when the overall economic outlook inevitably soured. Eventually, they hit upon a revelation that, in retrospect, seems obvious. Problem one (Where are we going to get the money to save Social Security?) and problem two (What are we going to do with all that surplus money?) were actually solutions to each other. And so Clinton used his speech to declare that "every penny" of the budget surplus should be put aside until Social Security became solvent.

It was a bold, dramatic announcement, a call to arms, the sort of statement that becomes part of a president's legacy, like Ronald Reagan's "Tear down this wall!" There was just one problem. Nobody knew exactly what Clinton meant—not even Clinton himself, who is now weighing his options while remaining publicly noncommittal. The week after Clinton's speech, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and budget director Franklin Raines told confused members of Congress that Clinton promised nothing more than to wait on spending the budget surplus until Congress had agreed on a plan to reform Social Security, presumably next year. Interpreted this way, Clinton's stirring pledge means almost nothing. The budget surplus over the next couple of years is projected to be vanishingly small—it won't really start to grow for a few more years—so refraining from spending it would be easy.

But the White House is also considering another, more momentous interpretation of Clinton's announcement: Use all future surpluses to pay down the national debt and then credit the sum of those repayments toward future Social Security expenditures. This is a substantively sound and politically shrewd new idea. If Clinton takes it up—if he lives up to his own ambitious pledge—it could reshape the fiscal debate long after he leaves office.

The ideological basis of the surplus–for–Social Security scheme lies in fiscal conservatism, which holds that paying down the national debt is the most productive use for the budget surplus. As the government sells back its debts, more investment is available for the private sector. This would eventually improve productivity and increase living standards.

Paying down the debt has always appealed to the castor-oil crowd—classical conservatives, editorial writers, and economists. But it has never had any broader political appeal since the benefits are long-term and abstract, while tax cutting or new spending offers tangible, immediate profit for voters.

Connecting the surplus to the trust fund would introduce a clever new twist. It would take a popular government spending program—actually the *most* popular government spending program—and tie its preservation to debt reduction. Downsizing the debt would no longer be merely good for you in some hazy, abstract way. It would be a necessary step to preserve your retirement. The genius of this scheme is that it would split Republican deficit hawks away from Republican tax cutters, forming a coalition that extended from the left to the near right. Even conservative Republicans like Phil Gramm and Mark Neumann have already joined with Democrats in praising the idea.

There is more to this idea, however, than merely putting a liberal gloss on an old conservative idea or tactically outflanking the far right. It also contains an innovative and sneakily progressive way to reform Social Security. Remember, Social Security is a trust fund, financed exclusively by regressive payroll taxes collected from today's workers. On the books, the trust fund is a separate entity from the rest of the federal budget. That means general tax revenues—mainly progressive income taxes—don't pay for Social Security at all. Right now the

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trust fund has a sizable surplus because the workers are depositing more than the retirees are withdrawing. But in 15 years, due to demographic changes, Social Security will start to pay out more in benefits than it takes in. And about 16 years after that, the trust fund will exhaust all the surplus built up over the years. Social Security will be bankrupt.

To preserve Social Security, then, the federal government needs to increase the money coming in, or cut back on the money going out. And politicians have long assumed that doing either would somehow involve an agreed-upon slate of changes, each with its own political and moral hazards. Hiking the payroll tax would hurt the working poor since it's an extremely regressive tax. Raising the retirement age would penalize manual laborers, who can't physically keep working into old age. Cutting benefits across the board would stick it to some elderly people who don't have a lot to spare. Cutting benefits only for better-off retirees—"means-testing"—would jeopardize Social Security's political support, which is based on its universal distribution of benefits. And means-testing would also discourage saving—why provide for your own retirement if it's just going to be offset by lower Social Security checks?

Clearly, none of the above options look particularly appetizing, but until now nobody had a better idea. Given that Social Security is ostensibly a self-financing system, it seemed inevitable that reform would entail either raising a regressive tax or cutting benefits. But using the budget surplus would change everything.

Suppose that the federal government pays down $1 trillion in debt over the next decade—that's the sum total of surpluses the White House projects—and credits that money to the Social Security trust fund. That $1 trillion in surpluses comes from general tax revenues. This means that today's general tax revenues would pay for tomorrow's Social Security benefits. Why is that so important? Because general tax revenues are progressive, and hence the burden of reform wouldn't fall solely on workers or Social Security beneficiaries. Using these funds would provide a way out of the self-financing trap.

Of course, this would not obviate the need for additional reform at some point down the road; crediting the entire projected surplus to the trust fund would at best wipe out only a quarter of Social Security's actuarial future deficit. And this caveat has already roused the suspicions of some deficit scolds. "You really need to bite the bullet and raise taxes or cut benefits," clucked David Jones, an investment-banking economist, to *The Boston Globe*. "I just don't like shortcut solutions, and this has the flavor of a shortcut solution." This is where the monklike ethic of fiscal restraint veers off into masochism. After all, if you're living beyond your means and you suddenly inherit a tidy sum of money, you don't turn it down on the grounds that it would forestall needed self-discipline. You take it and live off it for as long as you can.

None of this is to say that paying down the national debt represents the ideal use for 100 percent of the surplus. Plenty of worthy spending programs have been trimmed in recent years, and they could use more funding. But if Clinton tries to siphon off even a portion of that surplus for more spending, he would give up his strongest argument against cutting taxes—that doing so would threaten Social Security. For the strategy to work, Clinton has to resist the understandably strong temptation to skim a little of the surplus for pet projects, even good ones. The surplus-for-Social Security formulation shuts out any room for tax cuts only if Clinton can claim the entire budget surplus as a moral necessity. The whole strategy, in other words, requires a complete refusal to compromise. And that in itself would be a new direction for Clinton. •

THE HARD QUESTIONS

LEGAL LIMITS

By Glenn C. Loury

Delinquency and drug abuse, the degradation of marriage, the loss of human dignity—such is the moral decline about which we hear every night on the local news. These are symptoms of broader cultural problems—radical individualism, moral relativism, and materialism—that religious traditionalists rightly decry. Even many secular liberals would agree on the urgency of this crisis, but what exactly is to be done? Cultural conservatives would have us believe that government, politics, and public policy should be instruments through which to affect a moral revival. And because they speak on these matters with such great authority, it is tempting to believe them.

But it's a temptation we should resist. Modernity is upon us, and it will not be rolled back by public policy. If the country faces cultural problems, we stand a much better chance of fixing them not through government, but through spiritual revival and the building of new, energetic, and vital religious communities distinct from the state. This is a lesson we have learned sometimes painfully in the last half-century. And it's a lesson of particular relevance today.

To be sure, we can send signals about moral commitments through public policy. We can legislate against drugs, divorce, pornography, or premarital sex. We can funnel resources into mediating private institutions—by making charitable organizations tax deductible, for example. And we can intervene in citizens' lives—through welfare-eligibility rules, or the criminal justice system—to encourage responsible behavior.

But when all is said and done, these instruments are insufficient to the moral task at hand. Public policy has

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only limited reach, and, inevitably, even modest undertakings have negative repercussions. The signaling of values through law, in the face of widespread behavior contradicting the values in question, breeds cynicism of legal institutions and, in turn, undermines the law's very authority. The fiasco of Prohibition taught us that.

Expanding the charitable activities of private institutions through the infusion of tax-deductible funds risks changing the very essence of those institutions, distorting their missions. State-sanctioned coercion, meanwhile, is an extremely crude tool. One has only to consider the largest such undertaking, the prison system—populated by one and a half million souls on any given day—to see the point: Incarceration on such a scale may be required, but nobody seriously maintains that it does anything to promote morality.

Yes, divorce can be a terrible, tragic thing, particularly for the children; the growing interest in making divorce more difficult seems appealing. Yet even among intact families parents are devoting less time to children often because both parents must work in order to make ends meet. Today's adults may be more reluctant to sacrifice their own personal fulfillment in order to promote their children's development. If so, I would suggest that this is the real disease, with divorce being but a symptom. And it's something that will not be solved by putting more hurdles between divorcing parents and the courthouse.

Many Americans lament the extent of abortion in the land. Although I am not a constitutional lawyer, I would agree with its critics that *Roe* v. *Wade* is bad law. Yet, what do we really think would happen if abortion were left to the state legislatures? Do we really think many would make it illegal? When Mother Teresa, speaking about abortion, lamented that we now have a world in which a baby is not safe from its own mother, she was addressing the heart of the matter and the need for a solution that can't be found in a statute book.

Indeed, the desire to use laws as an instrument for fending off the corrosive effects of modernity is extremely problematic. Not least are the dangers of hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Moralizing through politics and the law can be a seductive way of deflecting attention from the mote in one's own eye.

When there is breakdown in the moral fabric, it is necessary to ask who has the authority to reconstruct it. And, more importantly, what is the source of that authority? There is something about human relationships that is essential to the establishment of this authority. Consequently, the building of authoritative and respectful relationships where they do not now exist becomes a basic requirement if we are to be serious about forestalling the corrosive effects of modernity. That is not an activity amenable to being advanced through cultural politics and the law.

This point is of special importance when thinking about moral decay in the inner city. We are all in this together. Those people are our people, whether they're black or white, crack-addicted, juvenile felons, or worse. And speaking as a Christian, the imperative is love. We should be embracing these people, not demonizing them. I deeply regret that the public posture of Christian political activists does not reflect that compassionate stand more convincingly.

I am sympathetic to the efforts to strengthen civil society about which we hear so much these days, including the devolution of responsibilities for social reconstruction from government into the voluntary sector. But my conservative disposition makes me cautious about taking a set of simple ideas and using them to restructure a vast social undertaking. Millions of Americans now depend on a welfare-state apparatus which, however flawed, also has some great achievements to its credit. I would not quickly change the institutions on which so many people rely without having a pretty clear idea about what I expected to happen as a result of doing so. So far, welfare reform has produced encouraging results, but much can still go wrong.

I am also ambivalent about a vision that sees churches as the primary instruments of social service. Of course, the charitable work of religious institutions must go forward, but I am troubled at the thought of churches becoming vehicles for funneling billions of dollars into the hands of needy people. Churches should, first and foremost, be about spirituality. If they were, the parishioners would go out into the world and do what needed to be done on their own.

There is a place in the Christian scriptures where the Apostle Paul writes: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." Politics and policy are worldly weapons. Those of us concerned about moral decay should never lose sight of their limits. •

Yevgeny Primakov, Saddam's little helper.

THE ODD COUPLE

By Amatzia Baram

As the situation in the Gulf heats up yet again, a familiar figure is once more in the spotlight: Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov. As usual, he is trying to play peacemaker and avert the impending military action against Iraq by brokering one more last-minute compromise between Baghdad and the U.N. Primakov is Russia's leading Iraq hand. And his relationship with Saddam Hussein goes back almost 30 years—a fact of which Primakov is proud. But if Primakov's current efforts follow the pattern of his previous attempts, nothing good will come of them.

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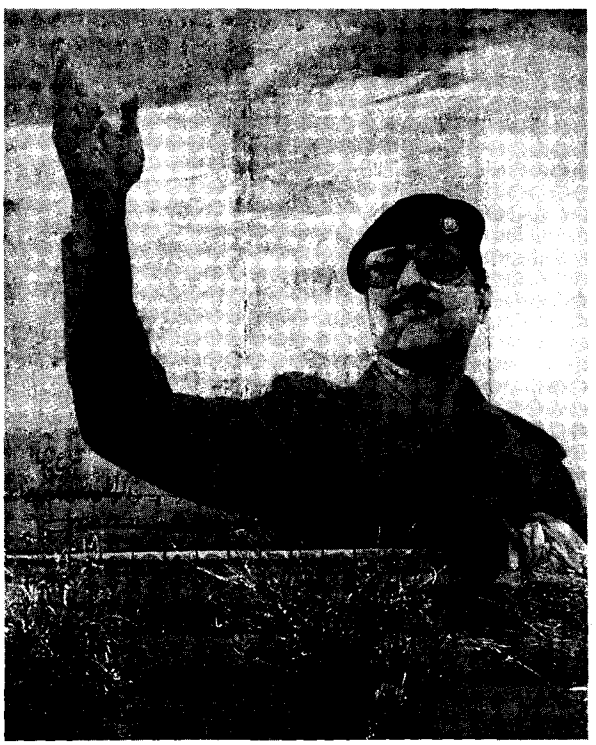
Rather than increasing the chances for peace, Primakov's meddling has repeatedly undercut them.

Primakov's history with Iraq dates back to 1969. Then *Pravda*'s Middle East correspondent, he was a frequent visitor to Baghdad—as a "reporter" for the Soviet Communist Party's official organ and for the Novosti News Agency. This was the cover under which he carried out delicate diplomatic missions and apparently spied for the KGB. In this capacity Primakov soon made the acquaintance of Saddam Hussein—then still nominally Iraq's number two but already recognized as his nation's strongman. Primakov and Saddam quickly developed what might be described as a friendship—were it not for the fact that Saddam *has* no friends. In Primakov, Saddam found an interesting and informative conversationalist, fluent in Arabic and knowledgeable about Iraqi and Arab affairs. In Saddam, Primakov found a reasonably pliant negotiating partner who was occasionally willing to sign agreements—like the 1970 autonomy pact that Primakov brokered between Saddam and a rebel Kurdish leader—which would help Primakov advance the interests of his motherland as well as his own career.



Of course, Saddam was not exactly an unreserved admirer of Primakov. After all, the Russian represented a formidable superpower with a Communist constituency inside Iraq that could threaten Saddam's own rule. And Saddam's relationship with that superpower has been uneasy in the best of times and downright hostile in the worst of them. (Some particularly low moments include the early and late '60s, when Saddam's Baath party massacred thousands of Iraqi communists, and the late '70s and early '80s, after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.) But throughout the '70s and '80s, as Primakov was promoted to chief editor of *Pravda* and director of the Institute of Oriental Studies—all the while maintaining his link with the KGB—he continued his visits to Baghdad and kept up close relations with Saddam.

Primakov's special relationship with the Iraqi dictator came in handy in 1990, when Saddam precipitated a Middle East crisis by invading Kuwait. Saddam had calculated that, with the decline of the Soviet Union, the United States would no longer be inclined to view his invasion as a Soviet plot. Instead, Saddam reasoned, Washington would judge it a local affair and treat it accordingly. Needless to say, Saddam reasoned wrong. In October 1990, as an allied counterattack loomed, Primakov rushed back to Baghdad to find a way to help his old associate avert war. However, the message Saddam appeared to take away from those meetings (in addition to meetings with French envoys) was that negotiations would continue beyond the January 15, 1991, deadline announced by the U.N. So Saddam dug in, and by the time it finally dawned on him that war was almost certain, it was already too late.

Undeterred in February of 1991—soon after the aerial bombardment had begun—Primakov made one last attempt to save Iraq from all-out war. This time the meeting took place not in a command bunker but in a private home in Baghdad. In his memoirs, Primakov recalls that the Iraqi leader had lost 20 to 30 pounds during the three months since their last encounter. According to Primakov, he sternly warned Saddam that Iraq could not withstand the imminent American ground invasion. But Saddam had a "Masada complex," Primakov explains, and refused to see reason.

Iraqi sources, however, report a slightly different version of the events at that crucial meeting. According to Sa'd Bazzaz, then-editor-in-chief of the Iraqi government daily *al-Jumhuriyya*, Primakov opened not with a warning, but by saying what he knew the Iraqis would want to hear. He pointed out that Mikhail Gorbachev had expressed his objection to the conduct of the war. (The Soviet leader had denounced the bombings as exceeding the U.N. mandate.) And Primakov added that he himself had given an interview to *The New York Times*, denouncing the U.N. resolution authorizing Desert Storm. "I am speaking, thus, as a friend," Primakov reportedly exclaimed. "The Soviet Union is interested in maintaining a strong Iraq under your regime," he added. He also complimented Saddam for his brave and staunch resistance against a far superior enemy. Then, instead of confronting Saddam about the folly of resisting the allied onslaught, Primakov took a more diplomatic tack—suggesting that politics was "the art of the possible," and Saddam would need to "compromise."

Instead of increasing Saddam's willingness to make a deal, Primakov's approach merely stiffened the Iraqi leader's resolve. He reminded Primakov that, whatever his view of the U.N. resolution, it had already been adopted, implying that the Russian's rhetoric was empty. And he offended Primakov by snidely noting that "it seems you were better when you were the chief editor of *Pravda*." Saddam then asked Primakov what the USSR was ready to do in light of Gorbachev's denunciation of the

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U.S. attack. Primakov asked to speak with Saddam in private. The Iraqis claim that Primakov then promised to support them somehow against the allies. There is no way of knowing if this is true, but Saddam clearly emerged from the meeting—and from later contacts with the USSR—with the belief that he had a better way out than total and immediate withdrawal from Kuwait.

After the war, Saddam and Tariq Aziz blamed the USSR for their own strategic mistakes and expressed frustration at the fact that the Soviets did not rush to their aid as allegedly promised. To be sure, regardless of whether the Russians had made such promises, the Iraqi leadership clearly should have known better. After all, at that moment the Soviets were at their lowest ebb and could deliver very little.

But what is surprising and instructive is the fact that this pattern of Russian–Iraqi relations has repeated itself several times since. For instance, in mid-January of 1996, when the French and Russians promised Saddam that in exchange for Iraqi acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 986 they would push hard for the total lifting of the U.N. embargo, the Iraqis amazingly seemed to believe that Russia and France had enough clout to do so. They were then deeply frustrated when they realized this was untrue.

This past November, Primakov—now Russia's foreign minister—put off military conflict by brokering yet another ill-conceived Iraqi–U.N. compromise. The details of the deal Primakov concluded with Tariq Aziz are not yet known. But by January, voices in Baghdad were already grumbling about promises not kept. Again, there is no way of telling who is most at fault—the Iraqis or the Russians; but the Iraqi–Russian diplomatic workshop has once more produced frustrating results.

Now, Primakov is trying for the umpteenth time to bridge the American–Iraqi chasm through a compromise. His latest proposal (as of this writing) is that eight of Saddam's presidential palaces be subjected to U.N. weapons inspections rather than all of them. But even if the Iraqi side agrees to the proposal, the United States and Great Britain will not. In the meantime, Saddam is digging in again, which will make it much more difficult for him to give in eventually.

To be sure, Primakov is trying to act in what he believes is his country's best interest—and lifting the sanctions on Iraq is a top priority. Iraq still owes Russia at least $7 billion from the pre-1990 war era, and Saddam has promised to resume payment as soon as the oil embargo is lifted. In addition, Russian sources report that Russian firms and government agencies have signed contracts with Iraq since February 1996 to the tune of ten or eleven billion dollars. Once the embargo is lifted, Russia will participate in developing the huge oil fields of West Qurna and North Rumeila. Iraq has also asked to buy Russian antiaircraft and antitank missiles. Finally, Yeltsin is under pressure from a very nationalist Duma to demonstrate independence from, and even defiance to, the U.S.

As for Primakov himself, he maintains that Russian influence in the Gulf is designed to serve the cause of stability and peace. He emphasizes that this influence will be achieved through cooperation with the U.S. rather than through confrontation. But Primakov's diplomacy boils down to a series of promises—to the U.S. as well as to Iraq—that Russia cannot keep. The net effect is to mislead and frustrate both, thus making war more likely. Hopefully, this time around both Primakov and Saddam will be more realistic.

AMATZIA BARAM is a professor of Middle East history at the University of Haifa and a senior fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

History repeats itself in the Gulf.

THE RECKONING

By Fouad Ajami

This latest episode in the long-running saga of America and Saddam Hussein has placed us in a position not unlike that of Bill Murray's character in the movie *Groundhog Day*. In that story, a television weatherman gets trapped in a time warp and is forced to relive a particularly dreadful day in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Like that weatherman, we seem to be living in the past. Events are unfolding before us with a repetitive, nightmarish tedium. Is this Tariq Aziz on our television screens, have we sat down for yet another round of discussions of the "Arab street," and is this Yevgeny Primakov trying to sandbag American policy and to forestall another strike against Iraq? There has been no deliverance from our troubles in the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi strongman is in his bunker, but the U.S. is also in a ditch of its own making. Seven years after

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the drubbing of a leader whom we had declared to be "worse than Hitler," we are stuck at the same dreadful impasse where American leaders left us when a brilliant military campaign ended with the victors' reticence.

The Clinton administration may or may not launch air strikes against Iraq. But if the past is any guide, there is no escaping the irresolution our officials convey—the suspicion that, even were air strikes to come, they would merely be a variation on the pinpricks aimed at Iraq in the past. We blow hot and cold over this matter of Saddam; we hold up our chastisement of him as evidence of imperial will. Saddam is the familiar menace when all else fails. There are the sanctions on Iraq's oil trade, and they convey a clarity of purpose. But it is easy to see through the thing. We continue to punish an entire population; we have degraded and impoverished a vast Iraqi middle class only because we had let a terrible dictator off the hook. For all of America's imperial pretensions, the Iraqi dictator has found a resigned acceptance in his neighborhood. He is feared in Kuwait and reviled in Saudi Arabia, but he has worked his way into his world and has become familiar and banal again.

The great, distant sahib has come and gone, but the local predator has stood his ground. The posse that went after Saddam is a distant memory. We had enlisted Turkey in that campaign, but the leader who made that choice, Turgut Ozal, died in 1993. Desert Storm and its aftermath imposed a huge burden on Turkey. There was treasure that the Turks lost when they shut off the Iraqi pipeline, and there was the thorny Kurdish problem of Iraq spilling into Turkey's own borders, bringing troubles and desolation to its southeastern provinces, unsettling the Turkish state. We had not been unduly solicitous of Turkey, and the Iraqi strongman nearby offered his services as a gendarme who would deny the terrorists of the PKK (the Kurdish Workers' Party) a sanctuary in Iraqi Kurdistan. It was not a pretty choice that the Turks faced: The Kurdish terrorist fringe had found support in Iran and Syria; a common cause had to be made with Saddam.

Nor does the U.S. venture into the same Arab world it encountered during Desert Storm. During that campaign, we came into an area seized with panic. A predator had risen from within, and his neighbors sought the protection of a distant power. We had not conquered Arab hearts and minds. There was protection to be given the sparsely populated lands of the Gulf, and there were dividends for the Syrians and the Egyptians who gave an Arab cover for American power. We will have to supply the moral outrage and the concern this time around and load it along with our military gear. There is a deafening silence in the Arab world about Saddam. Put plainly, the American complaint about Saddam's weapons of mass destruction has very few takers in Arab lands. It is ironic that a great power would come from afar with dire warnings of terrible and deadly weapons only to be greeted with local indifference, but there is no denying the discrepancy between the American reading of Saddam and the way the dictator has been folded into the local order of things.

True, we will find a measure of support for a serious campaign against Iraq in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, for Kuwait is particularly menaced, and the Saudis are reluctant to break with American power. In good measure, the resolve of these states will be derivative of America's own policies. They will come out into the open, but only if American power is determined to break Saddam. The American abdication was not lost on America's allies in the summer of 1996 when Saddam sacked the "safe haven" of Kurdistan and was met with a feeble American response. The two volleys of missiles aimed at his military installations had to be fired from ships in the Gulf and B-52 bombers which flew in from Guam. No one wanted to risk an association with a campaign that only served as a cover for a substantial American setback. We are again at the same impasse. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait will follow, but only if they sense that we are in this effort for real.

It is of no use for American officials to return from Middle Eastern excursions with reports that they have seen "eye to eye" with the rulers of these lands. We don't have Egypt's support this time around. The Egyptians now take a jaundiced view of the American role in Middle Eastern lands. There is new sympathy for Iraq in Egypt and a widespread Egyptian belief that our policies are nothing but a joint Israeli–American edifice of dominion. Hard as we might try to convince the Egyptians that we are in the region for good, that our policies are aimed at the stability of the region, we can't enlist Egypt in any effort against Iraq.

Meanwhile, in the United Arab Emirates, there are those who now see Saddam as a counter to the power of Iran. There are Arabs who are again given to the delusion that the Iraqi ruler is one of their own, and there are neighbors eager for commerce with Iraq. The region all around Saddam is poorer and hunkered down; even in the oil lands there are suspicions that we are hawkers, that our emissaries come to unload weapons and planes and telephones they can no longer afford, that our imperial writ is being used to shore up our trading interests, that in our eagerness to sell things we have lost sight of what these countries can bear.

In facile discussions, this deterioration of American authority in Middle Eastern lands is chalked up to the setbacks of its Palestinian–Israeli diplomacy—this is the old argument about "linkage" which we first encountered in the Gulf war of 1990–1991. American officials themselves have not been above seeking absolution for their troubles by hinting that it would all have been easier for them if they had a more "cooperative Israeli government." But this argument is pathetic in the extreme: During Desert Storm, America was able to establish a coalition in the face of a terrible Israeli–Palestinian impasse. Why? Because the Iraqi menace was real the last time, and American power was deployed and used in a serious way. Our power and

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authority, secured during Desert Storm, was not destined to last. We have not impressed those who, in the face of considerable odds, hitched their cause to ours: We played at unseating the Iraqi regime two or three years ago, enlisted Jordan's monarchy in that effort, and then cut the ground from underneath that operation and left the Jordanians with the debris of the abortive endeavor.

We can no longer avoid a reckoning with the sanctions we have imposed on Iraq: Those sanctions have outlived their use and are now seen as a weapon convenient to ourselves and cruel to the people at the receiving end of this brutal punishment. The pretense that these sanctions can topple the Iraqi regime—their very raison d'être, it must be recalled—can no longer be sustained. The new proposal by United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan to raise Iraqi oil sales from $2 billion to $5.2 billion every six months must signal the beginning of the end of the sanctions regime. We can't stand pat on a policy that is at once harsh and ineffective. Our officials have been indiscreet on the sanctions: In their utterances, they have let others in on the open secret that it is American policy that these sanctions are there to stay. Powers the world over now see America's Iraqi policy as a way that an administration barely engaged in international-security affairs bandies about its toughness in the world.

To break out of this long, dreary standoff, the Clinton administration will have to accept a burden dodged by those who waged Desert Storm: the remaking of the Iraqi state and the unseating of Saddam. We should be rid of the fears that paralyzed us in the past—the rise of the Shia, the fragmentation of Iraq. These are scarecrows: The Shia are the majority of the country's population, and an American policy wedded to their subjugation is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. There is no likelihood that a regime as brutal as Saddam's would emerge out of the rubble of a military campaign. There is no iron law of Shia radicalism, and the belief that a post-Saddam rule would be a satrapy of Iran misreads Iraq's realities, papering over the vast Arab–Persian divide that separates Iraqi Shi'ism from its Iranian counterpart. The very degradation of Iraq's capacities, the weakness of Iraq revealed during Desert Storm, imposes serious political and moral burdens on the United States this time around. We can't bomb from the air and steal away; there will be massive collateral damage, and our precision weapons will have a hard time locating the regime's arsenals of weapons. If we lack the will for a serious campaign against Saddam, and if the details of Iraq's political life remain as marginal to us as they have been for the last five or six years—the ditching of the Iraqi opposition, the betrayal of those who were working with us in the "safe haven" in Iraqi Kurdistan, would suggest a great measure of indifference on our part—the obsession with Saddam will have to be shed.

There is no use decrying the "lies" of the Iraqi regime, and we should not be surprised if around every corner we are met by yet another Iraqi effort to curtail the access of the weapons inspectors. Increasingly, there hovers over the American concern with Saddam a familiar mix of bluster and irresolution—the spectacle of a great power asserting imperial prerogatives but reluctant to walk the beat. We may all be in for a surprise: The Clinton administration may confound the skeptics still and pull off the "serious" and "robust" military campaign that its spokesmen tell us is just over the horizon. But if our heart is not in this enterprise, we should own up to it. This is being played out under a stark sky, in full view of a watching and curious crowd. •

A primer on the coming air campaign.

PLAN OF ATTACK

By Eliot A. Cohen

We are going back to Iraq. The official rationales for the coming clash are to destroy some of Saddam's capability to manufacture weapons of mass destruction, particularly biological weapons, to punish him for thwarting the United Nations inspection effort, and to force him to accept a resumption of inspections. Recently, Secretary of Defense William Cohen added a fourth objective—to weaken Saddam's ability to threaten his neighbors. What the administration seems to have in mind is a three-to-five-day campaign of air strikes—perhaps a few hundred strikes in all. Beyond that, though, the apparently imminent miniwar is clouded by fundamental but, so far, unanswered questions. We should think about them before we pull the trigger.

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What's wrong with the apparent U.S. attack plan?
First of all, it's probably too limited. Unless the administration increases the scope of the attack, there could be a mismatch of means and ends. The Pentagon admits that it cannot guarantee the destruction of all of Saddam's missiles and warheads (it's too easy to move them around). The Pentagon also concedes that Saddam can absorb a lot of punishment, and his ability to threaten his neighbors with conventional military means is already marginal. Depending on how the bombing is done and whether the French and the Russians begin taking Iraq's side, a brief campaign might even backfire, causing Saddam to become more stubborn. If American bombs accidentally kill a large number of civilians, Saddam could even use the episode to rally international support and force the U.S. to accept an unsatisfactory compromise on the U.N. weapons inspections and sanctions regime.

Why should bombing work any better than it did last time? After all, we bombed Iraq for over a month in 1991, and Saddam was still left with plenty of missiles and most of his biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons programs intact—and he himself survived just fine.

SADDAM HUSSEIN BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Should we bomb anyway?
Only if we do it in the right way and for the right reasons. Strikes should number in the thousands, not hundreds, and should go on for weeks, not days. This effort should be large enough to send an unambiguous message about American willingness to use military power. You won't hear the administration say so, but it is good for the Milosevics of this world to see one of their fellow thugs get a drubbing after defying Washington once too often. And it is good for some of our friends and occasional allies to realize that they cannot prevent the United States from vigorously using our military power. The "new world order" envisioned by the Bush administration (and limply embraced by the Clinton administration) rests on the big stick no less than soft talk.

The larger point is that we must make ousting Saddam a top priority. Since there are no guarantees that we can overthrow him using air power alone, there is no need for the administration to make this latter objective a stated aim of this campaign. Nor does it make sense, however, to preclude that as an objective. The United States can set Saddam's overthrow as a goal of our policy and a condition for ending America's quarrel with Iraq. By forcing Saddam out of power, the United States would not merely settle the politics of the Persian Gulf. It would allow the lifting of a regime of sanctions that inflicts much hardship on the Iraqi population. Furthermore, even if another thug replaces Saddam (the unfortunate likelihood), it will at least be a thug who will have learned the chastening lesson that the ultimate price of violent confrontation with the United States is personal ruin.

A lot of things have changed. For one thing, the Iraqi military has endured a prolonged embargo; as a result, its air defense system is fragile and obsolete. More importantly, the United States went to war in 1991 with six months' worth of hurriedly collected intelligence. Since then, U.S. intelligence agencies have given Iraq the most careful scrutiny, U.N. inspectors have combed it from end to end, and scores of senior defectors have given us information about how Saddam's regime works and what is hidden where.

Our technology is better, too. The armed forces now not only possess penetrating bombs which are especially useful for blowing up deeply buried command posts, labs, and storage sights, and which we began using only on the last day of the Gulf war, but we also have better ability to operate at night and far more (and better) precision weapons of all types. In fact, most likely *all* of the weapons used will be of the precision variety, as opposed to barely eight percent in 1991. With better intelligence and better weapons, we may not be able to

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find and obliterate every last biological weapons storage site, but we can certainly attack target systems (for example, telecommunications or the Republican Guard) even more effectively than in 1991. We know, moreover, from the continual reports of massacres of Saddam's associates and from the first-hand accounts of exiles (including some of his former lieutenants) that many, many Iraqis would like to see Saddam go. Even in 1991, Saddam's regime shook at the very end of the Gulf war. He recovered, but he is far from invulnerable.

So what would be the most effective way to do the job?
An attack on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, air defense system, and armed forces will provide cover for some of the other things we would like to do. The United States should launch a prolonged and intense campaign of bombardment which should go after those sets of targets, but it would also attack the Republican Guard, television and telecommunications systems, Baath Party and secret-police headquarters, and Saddam's presidential palaces—which are, as command posts, legitimate targets of military attack. A couple of weeks of disrupted communications, pain inflicted on some of those closest to him (who are both his protectors and his potential assassins), and forced relocation of the presidential party may very well pave the way for a coup.

Saddam's control of Iraq rests on direct and often face-to-face communications—during the previous Gulf conflicts, it was reported that he would personally order pilots on their missions. Make those direct contacts more difficult, put him even temporarily out of touch, make it clear that the United States wants Saddam out of power, and the chances of a successful coup rise substantially.

This will be a campaign of precision weapons. But even so, pilots will miss some targets, poor weather will obscure others, and still others will require restrikes. A substantial proportion of the munitions may very well misfire. Modern air power is a fantastic instrument, but despite the technical possibilities of pinpoint accuracy, it remains a saber, not a stiletto. That's another reason why the campaign should last longer than is apparently planned. That's also why we need access to bases in nearby countries from which to fly support and combat missions. Cruise missiles and attacks from aircraft carriers in the Persian Gulf, plus long-range bomber sorties from Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, will not suffice. If our Arab and Turkish allies believe that we have made the removal of Saddam from power our objective and that we will pursue that end relentlessly, they will permit us to use those bases.

Are these guys up to the job?
A weaker team than that of 1991 will take this country to war. Bill Clinton does not have anything like George Bush's feel for foreign affairs; William Cohen and Madeleine Albright are not as cunning or as tough as Dick Cheney and Jim Baker; and Sandy Berger, an amiable though competent lawyer, presides over a weaker National Security Council staff than did Brent Scowcroft, the Kissinger-trained retired general. On the other hand, the Clinton team has improved greatly since its first year in office, when an uninterested president, an amateurish staff, a mistrustful military, and otherworldly Cabinet secretaries would have stumbled all over one another. This is not a strong team, but it is a team. The nation's top soldier, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Henry Shelton, is solid and reliable and has a clearly defined conception of the role of the soldier as military adviser. The 1998 version of General Norman Schwarzkopf, the Central Command commander who will actually direct the operation, is a considerable improvement over his volatile predecessor: Tony Zinni, a burly and very smart Marine, who understands the use of force for the ends of politics.

Could things go wrong?
Even in peacetime airplanes crash. This could happen over Iraq, and Saddam could capture one or more American pilots, whom he could use as hostages and even torture. If the United States presses a vigorous air campaign, we should also expect collateral damage—and not least because Saddam will put Iraqi children near likely targets in order to generate unfavorable press for the United States. An errant bomb could hit a hospital, or a chain of accidents could produce a release of poison gas. Saddam might fire a few missiles at Tel Aviv, provoking an Israeli response if those missiles have biological warheads. During the last Gulf war, vigilant intelligence and police agencies prevented Iraqi-sponsored terrorists from succeeding in their missions. This time we may not be so fortunate, and explosions or assassinations might startle Americans who thought the war would stay far away. From a conventional military point of view, Saddam is helpless, but he still has a few cards to play, and he might get lucky.

One hopes that the president has had time, amidst his varied scandals and domestic priorities, to sit down with his military advisers for extended discussions about all of these contingencies. Presumably they would have outlined some rough courses of action in each case and run war games to explore the consequences. Alas, this is probably too much to hope. But at the very least the president should warn the American people of some of the unpleasant possibilities, particularly the probability that Iraqi civilians—including children—will die from American bombs. Above all, Clinton needs to steel himself for those possibilities and to prepare to take responsibility for them. Success as a war president rests not only on the technical competence and preparations of the armed forces as well as the skill of the country's diplomacy, but on the character of the leader at the top.

Did you say character?
Yes.

Uh-oh. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Stargazing, Pubcrawling

Consider Kenneth Branagh. This extraordinary man, born in Belfast and trained in England, helped found a theater company in England that specialized in Shakespeare, played leading roles there, also played various film roles, and then in 1988 directed and played the title role in a film of *Henry V.* Besides directing and acting in other films and other theater productions, he also directed and played the leads in films of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet.* This account is far from complete. Branagh is not yet 38.

His astonishing record is not just a matter of numbers: his three Shakespeare films, though not free of flaws, are genuine achievements—imaginative, vital, and, for the most part, truly Shakespearian. That is, they show understanding of texture and intent, and they find a style that serves the ideal of poetic transformation without gassy artiness.

These achievements are precisely a cause of trouble in Branagh's other films. When he plays leading roles in contemporary films, some of them directed by himself, he shows very little of the force and authority that are his in Shakespeare. He seems figuratively to be somewhat unclothed outside the great plays. In *Dead Again* and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein,* he struggled rather than accomplished. To remember, during those films, how he triumphed in Henry's St. Crispin's Day speech, or Benedick's joy at discovering Beatrice's true feelings—or the Hamlet soliloquies—is to feel wretched at watching this slight, sandy-haired fellow running around the screen in modern films trying to produce magnetism. (As if to prove the point, his Iago in Oliver Parker's *Othello* was, sweepingly, the best element in the film.)

Branagh's paradoxical flatness in modern things continues, increases, in **The Gingerbread Man** (Polygram). In this murder mystery based on a John Grisham story, Branagh plays a hot-shot Savannah lawyer who becomes involved with an attractive, apparently victimized young woman and ends up, through various twists, fighting to save his life and the lives of his children. Branagh's Southern accent—to a Northern ear—is passable, but Dixie accents have always been available to the British. (Remember that two of the principals in *Gone With the Wind,* Vivian Leigh and Leslie Howard, were British.) But little else in his performance is good enough. He is meant to be flushed with recent courtroom success, controlled and decisive, sexually dominant, and much more; and in all these aspects Branagh seems only the understudy filling in for the star.

The difference between the Shakespearian Branagh and the modern one seems clear. He *lives* in Shakespeare, fulfilling the role's life. In new stuff he keeps thinking of ways to be a star. But if you have to think about ways to be a star, you are not one, no matter how good an actor you may be. This distinction has often been explored, between a leading actor of talent and a person who plays leading roles with less talent but whose personality audiences want to be embraced by. Examples: Julia Roberts, a middling actress, is a star; Judy Davis and Meryl Streep, outstandingly talented, are not stars, no matter how the credits are typographically arranged. Sometimes the two components are blended: Paul Newman is an excellent actor and, from moment one, has been a star. Branagh is not a star. To make matters worse, outside Shakespeare he is not—so far, anyway—a reliable leading actor.

Does all this mean that he ought not to do any films except Shakespeare or comparable works? Well, economically unlikely as that is, it wouldn't be a bad fate for him or for audiences. But perhaps he could find important character roles in modern films, possibly in the Alec Guinness vein, that would enable him to hold us. (Guinness, marvelous actor, rarely tried for personality, yet he is beloved.) Shakespeare raised Branagh to the top; without Shakespeare, he seems uncomfortable there.

The Gingerbread Man is built on one of those particularly ludicrous plots in which, just before the end, we are meant to believe that a long succession of coincidences was really a diabolical scheme. If only one of those coincidences hadn't functioned—and all of them could have misfired—there would have been no film. The only notable performance is by Embeth Davidtz, who was devastating as the commandant's housemaid in *Schindler's List,* and who almost makes the frightened young woman credible. Robert Duvall plays her father, a religious nut; he has only a few scenes, in which he slices off some familiar Duvall product.

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Amistad. *A slave revolt in 1839 is graphically recreated by Steven Spielberg and an excellent cast, along with the resulting trial. The cinematic texture more than compensates for some compressions in the story. (Reviewed 12/22/97)* **Ma Vie en Rose.** *From Belgium, a delicate account of a small boy who wants to be a girl. The ending cops out, but the situation is perceptively treated. (1/26/98)* **The Sweet Hereafter.** *A snowbound town is desolated by a school bus accident. A lawyer attempting to help the sufferers uncovers human depths. Reticent and poignant. (12/8/97)* **Wag the Dog.** *Sizzling political satire about salvaging a presidential election campaign by inventing a war. The plot frays, but Robert De Niro and Dustin Hoffman keep perking. (2/2/98)*—**SK**

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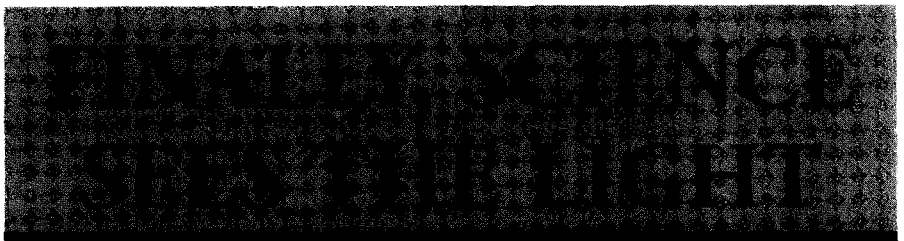
The directing is by Robert Altman and shows no trace of the characteristics that have endeared him to some—just as in another recent Grisham film, *The Rainmaker*, Francis Ford Coppola showed no traces of his individual style. Neither of these films was as enticingly directed as *A Time to Kill*, Joel Schumacher's version of a Grisham novel two years ago.

The English working class is getting its own back. For centuries in the theater and for decades in film, that class had been used only for fun or pathos or patronization. But in the last few decades, the working class has become the center for a full range of drama. Such directors as Ken Loach and Mike Leigh have insisted, fruitfully, on calibrating the lives of the sorts of people who never make the travel posters.

The success of Loach and Leigh and others has, however, brought its own difficulties. Just as the numerous IRA films have made *The Boxer* seem redundant, so **Nil by Mouth** (Sony Pictures Classics) is made to seem redundant by previous English films of this social concern. (The title is a medical direction that the protagonist once saw over his father's hospital bed.) This new film was written and directed by Gary Oldman, an exceptionally gifted actor, here making his debut as writer-director—and this actor places all his reliance on the acting. The script is for the most part a series of episodes about a London working-class family, all essentially familiar by now: pub parties and pub crawls, drugging, family quarrels and family fights, some of them bloody. As if to underscore that his people are his film, Oldman shoots mostly in close-ups.

But empathic and knowledgeable though he certainly is about these battered and battering lives, Oldman has been guided only by his concern, not by any apparent awareness of what recent British films have done in this general field. Not one scene, not one speech in any way enlightens or deepens what we have experienced in earlier films. Particularly oppressive is a very long sequence in which a drunken, enraged husband smashes up his wife and their apartment. Obviously we are meant to understand the social forces that have driven him, through his life, to this futile outburst; but, as with the rest of the film, Oldman has done nothing to make this scene anything more than predictable. The only small surprise is the happy ending, which doesn't quite fit.

By now it seems almost quaint to specify that the language is very blue. As for the cast, Ray Winstone is sufficiently animalistic as the husband, and Kathy Burke gets some pathos and courage out of the bruised yet stubbornly loving wife. •



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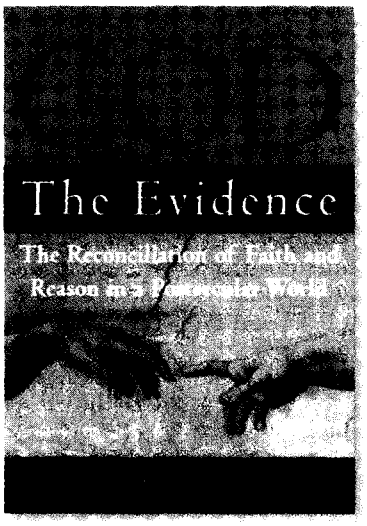

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Capitalism, Mormonism, and the doctrines of Stephen Covey.

White Magic in America

By Alan Wolfe

I.

As Joseph Smith related the story fifteen years later, he had been saying his evening prayers on September 21, 1823, when a flash of light revealed the presence of God's messenger. Smith was informed that in the fields around his house in Palmyra, New York he would find a book, written in gold plates, which would tell of the struggle on the American continent between the prophet Nephi, who had left Jerusalem for America in 600 B.C., and his brothers Laman and Lemuel, who, for their sinful behavior, had been cursed by God with red skin. For four consecutive years, Smith visited the spot where he found the plates, until he was permitted to take them home. Later Smith would translate the Book of Mormon to a small group of followers—six followers, to be precise, who, on April 6, 1830 established what they called The Church of Christ.

New religions of consequence are founded once every thousand years or so. Smith's would become, in this century, one of the fastest-growing and most economically dynamic religions in America. Still, Mormonism has always been the odd man out in America's Christian universe. "Smith's theology promised a radical departure from traditional Protestant Christianity," writes John L. Brooke in *The Refiner's Fire*, his superb study of Mormon cosmology. For one thing, the new religion offered a reinterpretation of the story of Creation. It was not that God came into being and then created man. Quite the contrary. "Man was also in the beginning with God," as The Doctrine and Covenant of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints puts it, and so man can aspire to divine status once again. Entry into the celestial kingdom was one of the most important promises that Smith offered his followers.

Heaven and hell were also revised by the new church. In fact, there was to be no hell at all—only three levels of heaven, depending on one's saintliness. The celestial realm was reserved for the Mormon Priesthood, the followers of Adam the first-born, who were worthy of divine exaltation. Below them in the terrestrial kingdom were those devout non-Mormons whose faith was sincere but who, as gentiles, could never experience the "fulness" of the Father. The lowest level, the telestial, was reserved for everyone else, even including, in Smith's words, "liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers." But this level, too, remained a heavenly one. Indeed, as Brooke points out, with the exception of a few "sons of perdition," "all mankind would find a place in one of the Mormon heavens." This was a cosmology of universal salvation. No one, from a Mormon perspective, need ever face the prospect of eternal damnation.

To put it mildly, Mormonism challenged traditional Christian notions of original sin. If latter-day descendants of Adam can aspire to divinity, then perhaps Adam never sinned at all. His decision to eat from the tree of knowledge, Mormons believe, was made voluntarily, just as those of the true Mormon faith come to their beliefs through the exercise of their own free will. God forgives Adam, who is eventually baptized and becomes His son. In 1852, Brigham Young would proclaim that Adam himself was a God. Atonement is not as important in the Mormon faith as forgiveness.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families: Building a Beautiful Family Culture in a Turbulent World
by Stephen R. Covey
(Golden Books, 390 pp., $25)

Gone were gloomy doctrines of predestination. And gone was the stern Protestantism that judged man as so constantly falling short of perfection that only through God's dispensation could he hope for even a glimmer of forgiveness. And gone was the Catholic conception of saintliness as an otherworldly quality reserved only for the very special few. In Mormonism, observes Brooke, "exaltation to godhead in the celestial kingdom would be fundamentally based on merit, rooted in a firm advocacy of moral free will." The Mormon God was, as we now say, nonjudgmental. You need not have been of high status to become one with God. Nor was it important that you led a life free of wrongdoing. It was enough that you chose, with powers under your own control, to obey Mormon law. Taken to its logical conclusion, Mormonism finds the source of divinity not in God at all, but within human beings themselves.

II.

Stephen R. Covey taught business management and organizational behavior for twenty years at Brigham Young University before becoming the most revered management guru in America. His book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which appeared in 1989, has sold over ten million copies, and it has been translated into 28 languages. His subsequent books—*Principle-Centered Leadership* (1991) and *First Things First* (1994), written with A. Roger Merrill and Rebecca R. Merrill—never enjoyed such astronomical sales, but they did appear regularly on lists of business bestsellers. Along with the inspirationalists Tony Robbins and Marianne Williamson, Covey met with President Clinton over Thanksgiving in 1994, after which Clinton informed a conference on work that productivity in America would increase dramatically if people would read Stephen Covey. In *The Witch Doctors*, a study of management gurus, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge attribute the success of Covey's books partly to the fact that they "actually have some relevance to mainstream management theory."

Covey resigned his teaching job at Brigham Young in 1985 to found the Covey Leadership Center, later called the Franklin Covey Company, in Salt Lake City, Utah. His firm, which offers "effectiveness advice," includes among its clients 82 of the Fortune 100 and more than two-thirds of the Fortune 500, as well as thousands of smaller companies. Its seminars have proven wildly attractive to organizations of many purposes. Covey works particularly well with

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school districts, Indian tribes, and prisons.

You do not have to travel to Utah to engage the services of the Franklin Covey Company. The company organizes "7 Habits" workshops in over 300 cities in North America and 40 countries worldwide. For $15,000, it will provide one of its senior staff as a speaker for corporate events. Its audio and video tapes are widely available. Covey's "7 Habits" organizers, which have proved popular as daily planners, are available in hand-held and software formats. All the company's books and magazines can be purchased through its Web page, as can such accessories as "7 Habits" page-finders. Rarely if ever in the history of publishing has one book spawned so many profitable by-products.

Covey's books are catechisms. They are devoted to elaborating "principles," which he defines in *7 Habits* as "natural laws that are woven into the fabric of every civilized society throughout history and comprise the roots of every family and institution that has endured and prospered." These natural laws are "just as real, just as unchanging and unarguably 'there' as laws such as gravity." They are, for Covey, self-evidently true. They can be transformed into habits so that we obey them automatically. And they are spiritually fungible, empowering us to act effectively whatever the situation we face. Through his books, seminars, and workshops, Covey does not tell us what to do; he tells us instead how to reach inside ourselves, find the right universal principle, and apply it, even when tempted by self-interest, the desire to be popular, or shortsightedness to do otherwise.

Seven such principles exist in the world, no more and no less. They are: (1) be proactive; (2) begin with the end in mind; (3) put first things first; (4) think "win-win"; (5) seek first to understand, then to be understood; (6) synergize; (7) sharpen the saw, by which Covey means engage in frequent self-renewal. Highly effective people begin within their immediate "circle of concern," those aspects of their lives in which they have significant emotional investments. As they learn to be "proactive," people win little victories in their private lives, and these victories gradually expand their circle of concern. As individuals master the first three habits, they lose dependency and gain independence, becoming responsible for the decisions that they make. But autonomy is only half the way to true effectiveness. We must also learn to transform our private victories into public ones, which we can only do by moving beyond the first three habits to the next three. Interdependence, not independence, must be our objective. Through synergy and win-win approaches, we avoid gloating and egotripping. We take pride in what our organizations do for all their members, not just in our personal achievements. And finally we realize that the process of applying these universal habits to our lives never stops, for the seventh habit calls upon us to commit and recommit ourselves to increasingly higher planes of effectiveness.

To move people along toward interdependence, Covey advises the importance of mission statements and time management. Every individual should have his own mission statement, focusing on what he wants to be and do. All successful organizations require mission statements, too. These should not be the products of top-down decision-making. Everyone in the organization has to be involved. Covey's company provides examples of successful mission statements; and it offers a worksheet, compatible with Microsoft Schedule+, to help people and organizations develop their own.

Mission statements are for long-term organizing; they are designed to help

WILL CHINA DEMOCRATIZE?

Find out in the current issue of the *JOURNAL OF DEMOCRACY.*

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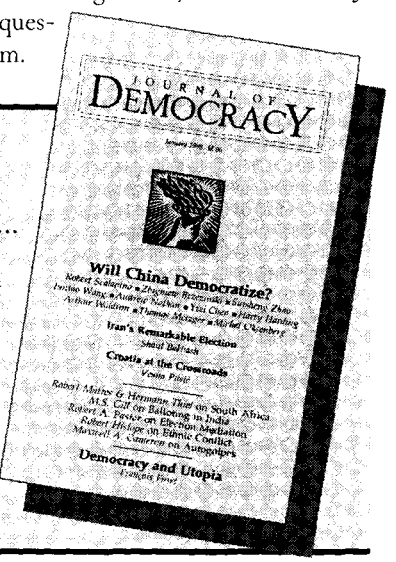

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people and firms realize their goals (Habit 2). Yet it is also important that people learn how best to use their time in the short run. Many of us allow urgent activities such as deadlines and interruptions to determine our priorities for us. We need to become Quadrant II people, capable of distinguishing tasks which are important but not urgent from those which are urgent but unimportant, and those which are neither urgent nor important. This is what Covey means by putting first things first (Habit 3), and it can be facilitated with the help of the weekly planners available from the Covey organization. These planners are not just for remembering appointments. They also enable highly effective people to list their weekly priorities for each week of the year. Then we can see how much time we actually spend doing those tasks that contribute to furthering our mission statements. Should we remain in need of guidance, Covey (along with A. Roger Merrill and Rebecca R. Merrill) recently issued *First Things First: Every Day*, a pocket-sized book of "daily reflections." This is the edification for June 6: "Quadrant II does not act on us; we must act on it. This is the Quadrant of personal leadership." "Can you begin to see the difference," Covey asks, "between organizing your week as a principle-centered Quadrant II manager and planning your days as an individual centered on something else? Can you begin to sense the tremendous difference the Quadrant II focus would make in your current level of effectiveness?"

Now there is a new book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*. "Applying the 7 Habits material to the family is an absolute natural," Covey writes. "It fits. In fact, it's where it was really learned." Obviously, principles deemed to be universal must be applicable to all realms of life; if they work in prisons and personnel, they must also work on parents and partners. As his wife informs readers in her foreword to the new book, Covey has fathered nine children—an accomplishment that surely requires effective time management. There are far more families in America than there are firms, though not very many of them are as large as Covey's. For that reason alone, there is a certain inevitability to the appearance of Covey's new book. Here truly is the prospect of universality. Just about everyone has been raised in a family, and just about everyone can find a fault or two with the family that raised them. The family is as common across cultures as it is central to our own discontents. It is certainly at the center of some of our most difficult political debates.

Covey advises family members to internalize proactivity (Habit 1) by developing an Emotional Bank Account. When you speak disrespectfully, or break a promise, or criticize someone, or refuse to apologize, or act insincerely, you make withdrawals from your account; and if you do this persistently enough, you will eventually have nothing left. To make deposits, you have to win the trust of those with whom you share your family. There are many ways to do this: by listening to what you say, by keeping your promises, by apologizing when you said or did the wrong thing. But one thing builds up the account more rapidly than anything else: "to get out of a judging mind-set, to stop trying to manipulate or give love conditionally." When you give up trying to control everyone around you, you learn that "one of the most empowering and exciting aspects of the Emotional Bank Account idea is that we can proactively choose to turn every family problem into an opportunity for a deposit."

Beginning with the end in mind (Habit 2) requires, as the reader has come to expect, a family mission statement. "Just as the United States Constitution has survived for more than two hundred sometimes turbulent years, your family constitution can be the foundational document that will unify and hold your family together for decades—even generations—to come." The mission statement for the Covey family took eight months to develop, and now, we are told, it applies across four generations. Simply writing the statement, Covey maintains, can be a bonding experience. He cites the story of a man who, in his own words, "was deep into the 7 Habits material and thought it would be great if we could write an extended family mission statement." So he asked his entire extended family to come together during vacation time, irrespective of whether they lived in Virginia, Ohio, or Utah. Each was asked to come with a prepared draft. "We made copies of everyone's mission statement drafts and distributed them," this man's testimony continues. "As each person read his or her draft, we marked our favorite lines." Eventually a family motto emerged from the exercise, which was printed on T-shirts for all members of the family to wear. The benefits were real and immediate. When the motel selected for the vacation turned out to be a disaster, everyone communicated openly and crisis was avoided. Members of the far-flung family decided to move closer to Mom and Dad. They even decided to run a business together. Writing a mission statement has "begun a new era in our family," the man concludes.

"Outside of making and honoring the basic marriage covenant," Covey writes in his chapter on putting first things first (Habit 3), "I have come to feel that probably no single structure will help you prioritize your family more than a specific time set aside every week just for the family. You could call it 'family time.'" Such spots of time are great opportunities for teaching the seven habits, since "family time is a wonderful time for problem solving." Out of the family hour, in fact, can grow a weekly schedule for everyone in the family, so that everyone will know his or her proper roles and goals. (In addition to family calendars, customers/disciples can purchase roles and goals worksheets from Franklin Covey; and teenagers can look forward to the publication of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, written by Covey's son.) But no one should get the idea that Habit 3 is all work. "One of the most important ingredients of any family time is fun. This is what unites and bonds family members. This is what creates joy and pleasure in being together."

"All people are very, very tender and sensitive," Covey writes in a discussion of win-win (Habit 4) and seeking first to understand (Habit 5). "Is empathy always appropriate?" he asks. "The answer is 'yes.' Without exception, empathy is always appropriate." Family pain, as we know from Deborah Tannen and John Gray, is usually the product of miscommunication. Such pain can be avoided by following principles of empathic listening. If we evaluate, advise, probe, or interpret, we generally do so from our own point of view. Instead we should reflect back on what others tell us, mirroring, summarizing, and reflecting their words so that they know we are really listening. In a win-lose situation, such as a basketball game, one plus one equals less than one. In a compromise situation, where each party gives a bit to accommodate the ego of the other, one plus one equals one and a half. A genuine transaction between two people creates a situation in which one plus one equals two. But those who practice the seven habits attain a situation of synergy (Habit 6), in which one plus one equals at least three. Once a family gets to that point, its traditions and daily practices will continually sharpen the saw (Habit 7). This will be a highly effective family.

III.

Unable to make much grow in the hostile soil of Vermont, Joseph Smith's family moved west to New York State in search of better farmland. There the soil was still flinty; but if it could not produce abundant crops, it

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did produce something else: Indian relics. Smith and many of his contemporaries became avid money-diggers, constantly turning up the ground in search of rare stones and an occasional gold coin. Around such activities there developed a cult of magic, as if the uncovered stones, when read in the context of animal sacrifice and ritualistic incantation, could tell people whose fates were so harsh what they could expect in life. Smith's biographer Fawn M. Brodie is clearly hostile to her subject (and relies on a generally discredited psychoanalytic framework), but she is right to argue that the origins of Mormonism can be found in Smith's hatred of soil-grubbing. His "discovery" of the Book of Mormon gave him the opportunity to elevate folk magic into a religion—and, in the age of a new awakening, into power, too.

The area of New York State whose religious fervor gave it the name "The Burned-over District" was also obsessed with counterfeiting. Money was in great demand in a cash-short economy. If it could not be had in the usual ways, unusual ways of providing it would be found. One of the great strengths of John Brooke's account of Mormon cosmology is that it locates the roots of Mormon thinking in European intellectual history. Still, even Brooke stresses the magical side of this new religion. He uncovers, for example, a relationship between divining (or money-digging), alchemy (or magical methods of turning ordinary minerals into gold), and counterfeiting: "All three were species of the miraculous, situated on points along a gradient from sincere spirituality to pure fraud, a gradient of hermetic purity and danger." Out of such conditions there developed a particular American version of the "confidence man," someone who could combine esoteric knowledge, technological secrets, and religious charisma in ways that would win the trust of desperate people, encouraging them to part with things of value to themselves.

For Brooke, Mormonism inherited a long tradition of hermeticism that produced such religious practices as numerology, astronomy, exorcism, millenarianism, and new dispensationism. But Brooke is careful to distinguish between the optimistic hermeticism of the Renaissance and the more dualistic and pessimistic accounts of man's fall. It was the former that influenced Joseph Smith, not the latter. Instead of Satanism and its fascination with black magic, Mormonism grew out of a culture of "white magic." Practitioners of white magic claimed that they—the cunning folk—could intervene with God. In Brooke's words, they "offered their supernatural services to solve mundane personal problems, claiming to heal the sick, to divine the future, to cast spells, to control the weather, to find lost property and ancient treasure hoards, and to protect against the devil and his minions, the sorcerers or black witches." White magic, while clearly containing elements of folklore and superstition, was, as Brooke points out, also a step on the road to modernity: "Hermetic thought would provide the key to the secrets of the cosmos. It was at its core an optimistic, expansive philosophy, celebrating the potential divinity and power of humanity."

White magic took special root in that new Jerusalem called the United States. This, after all, was the place of modernity's triumph, in which dark versions of the Apocalypse were never going to find a permanent home. Joseph Smith's new sect was in no way "revivalist." Suspicious of enthusiasm, Smith draped his theology in pseudoscience. He asked his adherents to read a book. He relied on witnesses and legal documentation to buttress his claims about his discovery. Mormonism, especially when compared with more emotional religions, had its share of intellectual appeal. "The importance of this appeal," Brodie notes, "cannot be overestimated, for it drew into the Mormon ranks many able men who had turned in disgust from the excesses of the local cults." Through its projects, especially the building and the rebuilding of its temples, Mormonism was an engineer's religion, a doctrine for the pragmatic, no-nonsense kind of person who practiced a kind of white magic on the material world, demanding that it yield its secrets for the cause of human betterment.

Joseph Smith claimed the title of prophet, but he was not prophetic in the Old Testament sense of the term. This was not a man invoking with passionate eloquence a world that had been lost, or judging the people of his day unjust and insufficiently sincere in their professions of faith. Smith practiced reverse charisma. Rather than holding up to his followers a vision and demanding that they follow it, he divined what his followers wanted and offered it to them. There would always be an element of what Brooke calls "interactive performance or theatre" in the relationship between Smith and his audience. Semi-modern in its content, Mormonism was also semi-modern in its delivery. Its founder anticipated the consumer preference survey more than he anticipated the Scopes trial.

To the degree that non-Mormons know anything about Mormon history, what they know is the church's early encouragement of polygamy. Plural marriage has its biblical and hermetic origins, but it is also possible to see in the sexual practices of the Mormon elders an anticipation of modernity. A qualified modernity, to be sure: as the Mormons practiced it, polygamy reflected strongly articulated notions of male superiority. It was also a hierarchical system designed to reinforce the privileges of the Mormon elite. Still, there is a certain perverse logic to plural marriage. Like many a modern man, Joseph Smith was unwilling to rein in his libido. Yet Mormons were fearful of anarchy and they preached obedience to priestly (and highly uncivil) law. What better way to link male sexual libertarianism with respect for order than by legalizing practices which, outside of Mormon circles, were considered adulterous? In their effort to reconcile hedonistic impulses with productivity and discipline, the Mormons not only discovered what Daniel Bell would later call the cultural contradictions of capitalism, they also found a way to bridge them.

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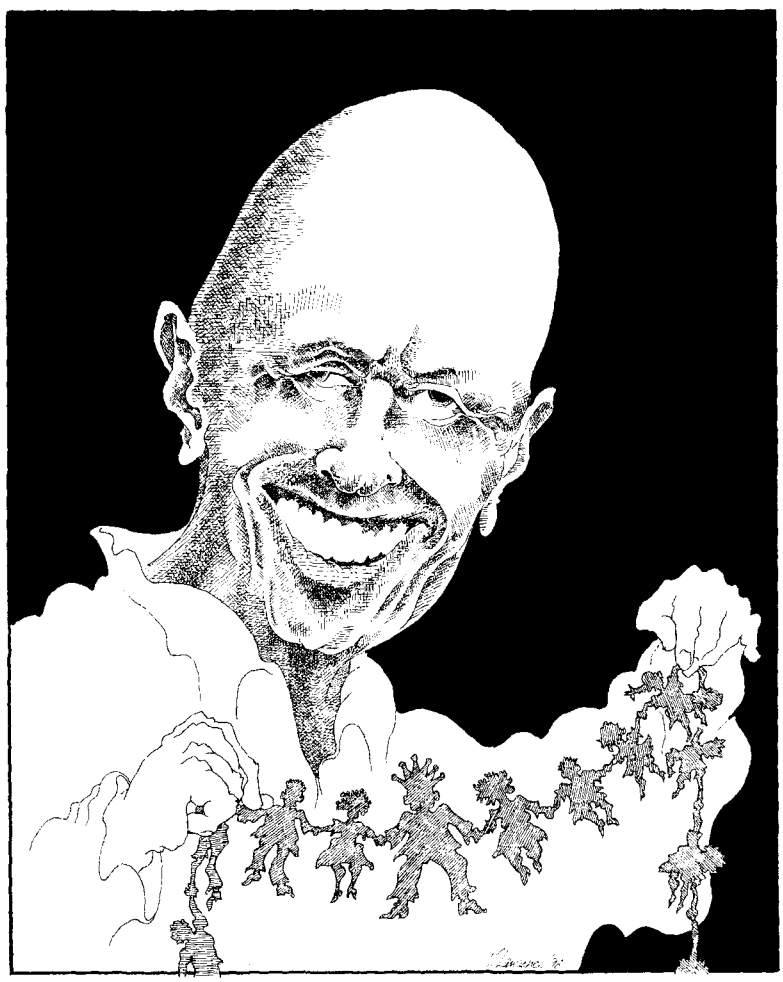
IV.

There is no easy answer to the question of why Stephen Covey's books have been such a commercial success. It cannot be the prose; Covey writes in a flip-chart manner, as if he barely pauses between the oral presentation to a seminar and the printed page. Nor can it be the logic: a book of practical advice that warns against advice-giving is incoherent. Nor can originality play much of a role. *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* repeats just about everything that one finds in Covey's earlier books, and in a remarkably uninteresting way. No, Covey's books are popular in spite of themselves.

One reason for Covey's success surely lies in the fact that, in contrast to old-fashioned management gurus such as Peter Drucker, today's purveyors of managerial wisdom aspire not to the profane but to the sacred. In contemporary America, management consultants have become moral leaders. It is not gaps in production they seek to fill, but gaps in the spirit. The theory of management is now more and more the theory of the management of the soul. No religious notion—no matter how New Age, mystical, or exotic—is alien to them. And now Covey joins them, adding to the mix one of the world's truly remarkable religious traditions: Mormonism.



STEPHEN COVEY BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Micklethwait and Wooldridge write that "Covey's own Mormonism has been lifelong and unflinching," before adding that "he bridles at the thought that his ideas are particularly American, let alone Mormon." Nowhere in his books does Covey talk about his specific religious beliefs; his discussions of God are offered in broadly ecumenical language. Covey's beliefs, moreover, are his own business. Reducing his thoughts to his Mormonism would be as wrong as reducing my thoughts to my (lapsed) Judaism. Still, we need not take what he told Micklethwait and Wooldridge as the final word on the subject. For Mormons have not always been honest about their ideas. Smith urged his followers to deny the existence of plural marriage even while encouraging them to practice it. Even today, despite official renunciation of the idea, unofficial plural marriages flourish as the legal authorities in Utah, imbued with the same spirit of moral relativism and unconcern with "victimless crime" that characterizes the rest of the country, look the other way.

One would hardly expect a man aiming for massive audiences in the gentile culture, and proclaiming laws that are deemed to be universal, to acknowledge openly the influence of a religious movement not fully trusted by most Americans. Yet the influences are incontrovertibly there. I do not mean to suggest that the *7 Habits* books are written cabalistically, translating Mormon doctrine into language acceptable to the gentiles and recognizable to the initiated. It is more that the ways in which Joseph Smith promoted his ideas and the ways in which Stephen Covey promotes his ideas are quite similar. Both are practitioners of a form of white magic. Indeed, Covey has brought the art of white magic to the writing and the publication of books.

Magicians of the more traditional sort aim to create an air of illusion, to convince their audience that something has just taken place which could not possibly have taken place. White magic has another purpose: its goal is to persuade people that things which are perfectly obvious, even completely known to them, can nonetheless be revealed to them. The seven habits, Covey's wife writes in her preface to his new book, are ones that "you already know in your heart to be true. That is why they seem so familiar. You've seen them in action. They've worked in your own life. You've even used them yourself—often." White magic redefines how we think about mystery. Its secrets are this-worldly, not other-worldly. Indeed, its secrets are not even secrets. Satan needs secrets because his struggle with God is win-lose: whatever serves evil cannot serve good. But Covey's teaching exists in a win-win world. I am going to tell you what you need to know to be effective, he promises, but I am also going to tell everyone else as well, as publicly and as visibly as my entrepreneurial efforts allow me, even those who may be your antagonists. Not to worry, however. If we all know what we have all known all along, we will all be better off.

Spiritual reflection—which Covey once defined as "a Quadrant II activity"—is very much a part of the *7 Habits* system. "In our own family," he writes, "we have found great strength in worshiping together." Nothing is more resonant with American culture than invocations of religion. Yet few things are more alien to most Americans than people who come across as religious fanatics. Americans want to be religious without having to suffer through the denial, the sacrifice, and the hard-boards endurance that religious asceticism demands. Joseph Smith offered them a way to do so. A religion without a conception of sin is, for all its earnestness, nondemanding. Spirit need never stand in the way of success. Joseph Smith was not in the business of building a movement of men of sorrow.

Covey shares this sense of weight-

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less spirituality. Religion cannot possibly offer a true and narrow path toward righteousness, for in a culture of nonjudgmentalism nothing can be righteous. Thirty years ago a law professor named Charles Reich wrote a best-seller called *The Greening of America* in which he argued that a new consciousness—Consciousness Three, he called it—was emerging in America, promoted by the young in rebellion against corporate culture. What Reich never realized was that corporate culture was itself undergoing an entry into the new consciousness. You do not get ahead in today's corporate environment by sternly judging the moral character of others. The law of corporate moral life is that everything is forgivable. For who knows which of today's sins will turn out to be tomorrow's growth markets? Stephen Covey is simply the Charles Reich of the management class. "When you understand, you don't judge," he writes, citing, of all people, Solomon, one of the great judges in the history of any religion.

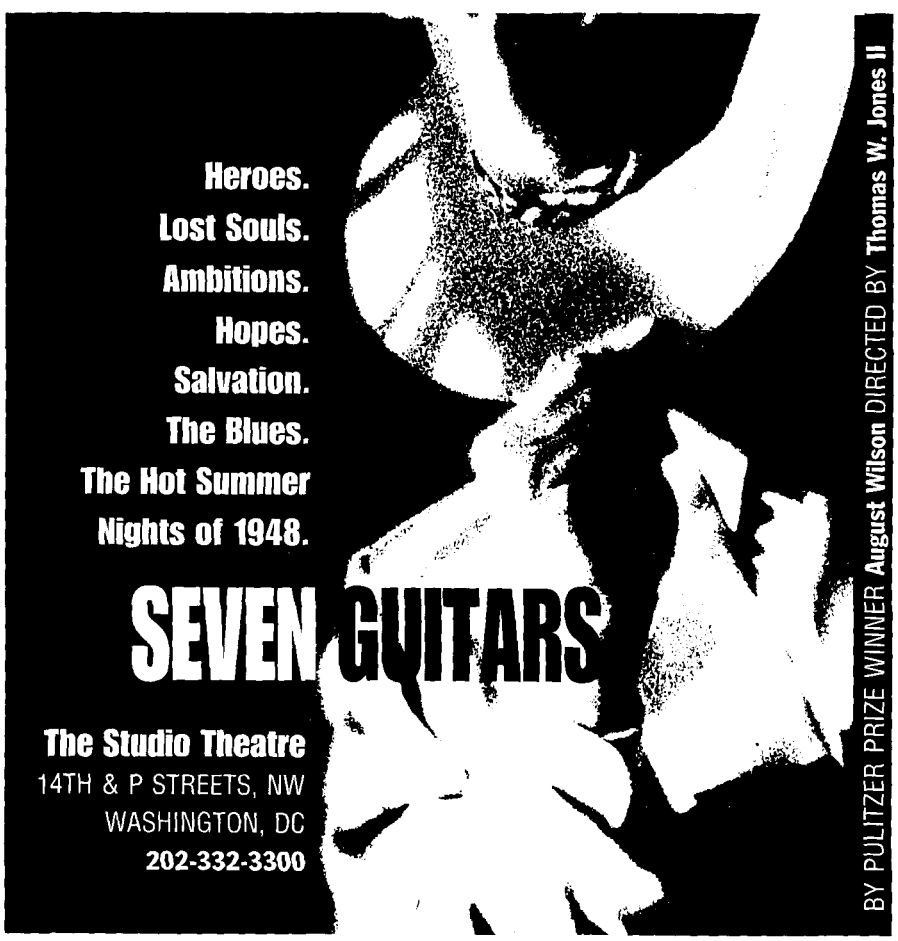
One of the things that Joseph Smith clearly understood was that a nonjudgmental religion, when linked to a hierarchical and authoritarian structure, would result in a religion incapable of judging its supreme leader. Covey's habits build upon the same idea. For all his talk about communication, empathy, and sensitivity, Covey displays throughout his books a deeply authoritarian outlook on the world. He begins his analysis of family life by relying on the metaphor of a flight plan. To get to your destination, he reminds his readers, you need to know where you are going. I have yet to fly on an airplane that asks for broad participation from its passengers in matters of navigation and safety. Similarly, in Covey's world, someone is always calling for a family meeting, asking for mission statements to be written, setting goals, defining roles, or determining which plans should have priority. It does not take much insight to guess the gender of that very significant person. And this is the case with Covey's family as well. "We've all felt a sense of unity and contribution over the years as the family supported me in my work—and later some of our children's work—in the Covey Leadership Center (now Franklin Covey)," he writes. There can be no doubt about who the pilot is in *this* family.

Nonjudgmentalism is usually associated with tolerance. By refusing to condemn the behavior of others as wrong, sinful, or immoral, we recognize and we accept a wide variety of human practices. But this is not an adequate analysis. It is essential to see that nonjudgmentalism is not at all like tolerance. To tolerate something, you first have to judge it. Toleration consists in being willing to allow something to exist even if you judge it to be wrong—which is why Mill, in *On Liberty*, argued for the right of Mormons to practice plural marriage even while asserting his moral repulsion at the practice. When people refuse to pass judgment, they manifest, if anything, an intolerant outlook on their world, for they are essentially saying that they do not have sufficient respect for anyone whose behavior or worldview differs from theirs to criticize it.

This may explain why Coveyism, like the doctrine of Joseph Smith, has such a low threshold for dissent. Covey's true attitude toward toleration comes out best in the many examples that he provides of people who have successfully used the seven habits system. None of this testimony sounds like the way real people talk. "I remember the first time my dad shared with us a principle of life," one of them says. "At that point we decided to put our faith in principles instead of in all the popular advice we were receiving," adds another. "When we learned about Habit 5, we decided that this might be the key to greater peace in our home," says a third.

All of Covey's stories have the same plot: People. Trouble. Habits. Happiness. There is never an unsuccessful application of a habit. No one questions the system and wins. Covey wants to share with us the experiences of real people. What he shows instead is the power of cultspeak. I hope Covey made these stories up. (Names and important details are not provided.) For if he is being truthful, then the implications are far worse. Following The Seven Habits, it would seem, produces obedient automatons.

Obedience to law is itself an important aspect of Mormon theology. But the law to which one has to conform is not the man-made law fashioned out of democratic conflict, revisable by appeal to moral principles of liberty and equality, and capable of being changed when proven short-sighted or ill-advised. Joseph Smith, the advocate of patently illegal plural marriage, viewed civil law with contempt, as if society were a vast conspiracy organized to prevent true believers from finding God as they saw fit. Covey shares this sense of hostility to organized society. He invokes the Constitution as changeless law, failing to note serious debates among eighteenth-



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century political theorists about whether later generations could properly be bound by laws they played no role in making. Like many spiritualists, he distrusts official religious institutions such as churches. He views children who have lost their way as "seduced by the culture," not appreciating the fact that "the culture" has been shaped by diverse and valuable influences, including Judeo-Christian morality, the ideals of democracy, and the canons of great literature. And he occasionally drops his didactic tone for an incendiary one. "We can no longer depend on society or most of its institutions," he writes, sounding like the Unabomber. "We must develop a new flight plan. We must rise above the turbulence and chart a 'true north' path."

The laws to which our obedience must be pledged are not the laws of the land, they are the Seven Habits of Effective Everything. Covey illustrates his way of thinking when he misunderstands a story about translation. On a trip to Jakarta, he notices that his remarks are being translated into Indonesian simultaneously as he talks. For Covey, "those translators ... had to be listening to what I was saying at the moment as well as restating what I had just said," rendering their work an example of what he calls "empathic listening." This is self-aggrandizing nonsense. Anyone who does translation of this sort knows that the one thing not involved is empathy. Search for understanding as you try to translate rapidly, and you will fall behind. Simultaneous translation requires a way of listening to words without actually hearing them. And that is very much the way Covey thinks about obedience.

Without habits, society would fall apart. Some things need to be internalized: looking out for cars as you cross the street, treating other people with respect. But thinking ought never to be habitual. For the essential characteristic of a habit is its unreflectiveness. And Covey wants his habits, too, to be reflexes. He does not want his instructions to be considered intellectually; he wants them to be absorbed unconsciously. When the message of a law or a habit comes into your brain, you are expected to translate it immediately into the action it demands. It is not your job to think about the message, to place it in a context, to interpret it, to find shades of ambiguity in its expression. The more simultaneous you are in transforming advice into a command requiring your assent, the more effective you are. This is not wisdom, it is indoctrination. In Covey's system, you gain control over your life by giving up control over your destiny.

V.

The fantastic economic success of Mormons in late-twentieth-century America—combined with the fact that our leading management guru is a member of the Mormon faith—demands that we revisit Max Weber. The most important affinity between Protestantism and capitalism, he believed, was precisely the theological tenet which Mormons reject: the possibility of grace. Protestants, especially the more puritanical sects, placed "premiums upon 'proving' oneself before God in the sense of attaining salvation," and in that way contributed to "a certain methodical, rational way of life which—given certain conditions—paved the way for the 'spirit' of capitalism," as Weber explained.

Coveyism suggests that Weber was not wrong. If anything, it is not only capitalism that owes a debt to Protestant ideas about salvation. The black magic of Faust, romanticism, the *Bildungsroman*, scientific exploration: all seem somehow related, as Weber stressed, to a theology that divided the world dualistically into forces of light and forces of darkness, and made the passage from one to the other a matter of self-sacrifice, discipline, and a sense of a calling. Mormonism, lacking a conception of grace, is unlikely to produce world-class literature. Its universities, suspicious of academic freedom, will hardly be hotbeds of artistic creativity. Its scientists, lacking the vocation for science, will be attracted to shortcuts such as cold fusion. And, most importantly for understanding Stephen Covey, its capitalism will not be the entrepreneurial, exploratory, dynamic capitalism about which Weber wrote, but a postmodern kind of capitalism organized for no particular purpose other than self-reproduction.

If, for Weber, religion was a spur to the development of capitalism, for Covey religion *is* capitalism. Nowhere does this become clearer than in Covey's startling and ugly metaphor of the Emotional Bank Account. Love, hate, rage, wonder, ecstasy, sympathy: they are to be regarded not as the all-too-human emotions that protect us from the rationality of the market, but as commodities to be stored for use when the price finally becomes right. For this reason, all is surely not well in Coveyville. For a family that expresses its love through mission statements is very much a family without feeling. It can have no character of its own. Its sole and only purpose is to survive in a world of similarly self-protective enclaves. It is merely a firm united by blood.

Stephen Covey's books must be read as a description of a capitalism that has no place to go. His ideal reader is not the person who creates wealth, it is the middle-level bureaucrat working in a large-scale organization trying to get through the day. Into this world of purposeless activity, Covey introduces structure. For people powerless to influence the destiny of the organizations for which they work, he offers the illusion of efficacy. In a world in which competition is sublimated into furious struggles over seating arrangements around tables, as if any change from yesterday to today must be divined for meaning, he tells his readers that winlose is over. Mormonism's great contribution to the work of Stephen Covey has been to provide the unwritten and perhaps unconscious assumptions for a secular version of what life means in organizations in which most people spend most of the time spinning their wheels. And now, we are told, the family has become another one of those organizations.

Bourgeois ideology rarely treated success in capitalism as a precondition for success in other realms of life. Hard-nosed and realistic when it came to the world of business, the bourgeoisie turned romantic and sentimental when it came to the world of the family. Feminists of a certain sort have criticized this division into separate spheres, as if, for women to achieve equality, the rules of the professions and the practices of the family have to be the same; and they have just been joined by Stephen Covey, whose self-announced objective is to further not loving families, not self-respecting families, not nourishing families, not decent families, not autonomous families, but effective families. This amounts to a managerialist redefinition of the family. By treating the family as just another form of organization, no different in any significant way from the firm, Covey conveys, in his breezily chilling manner, the sense of an Iron Cage far more impregnable than anything that the more tragic and pessimistic Weber could have imagined.

For this reason, Covey's intervention into America's debate over family values is not what one might expect. "Over the past thirty years the situation for families has changed powerfully and dramatically," he writes near the beginning of his book, citing increasing rates of illegitimacy, divorce, teenage suicide, and the usual indicators of cultural decline. This is the boilerplate of contemporary politics in America. But if the conservative response to family decline is to urge

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individuals to recommit themselves to traditional family values, then Covey is no conservative. One finds almost no discussion in this book of the factors that have caused the family to weaken. There is no criticism of women for entering the workplace. Covey never tells parents to discipline their children; indeed, he demands that parents listen to their children "without any moral evaluation or judgment." Nobody is blamed for the increase in divorce. Nobody is asked to suppress his or her desires for immediate gratification for the sake of long-term family stability.

And none of this should be surprising. Mormons are not exactly in the best position to take the lead in urging a restoration of conventional family structures. Indeed, radical feminists, postmodernists, and critical-race theorists—for whom the same conventional family ideology is taken to be oppressive to gays or people of color—recognize in the polygamous history of Mormonism a potential ally in their efforts to undermine the moral legitimacy of the nuclear family. To be sure, writers of this persuasion are not enamored of the ways in which plural marriage oppressed women; but at least one of them, Peggy Cooper Davis in her recent book *Neglected Stories*, would reopen *Reynolds* v. *United States*, the Supreme Court decision which upheld a congressional law outlawing plural marriage in the states and territories.

Covey himself does not advance an argument on behalf of plural marriage. He expresses nothing but undying love for his wife and children. Yet if we listen to the way Covey talks about the family, it becomes clear that he holds an extreme version of moral relativism from which it is impossible to support and to justify one kind of family over any other. We do not, from Covey's point of view, need a moral sense. We can live without strong institutions. We need not rely on culture. The Judeo-Christian tradition—a judgmental way of approaching the world if ever there was one—would lead us in the wrong direction. We do not need law. All we need is the doctrine of the Seven Habits. "With this framework you can diagnose or figure out just about anything that happens in any conceivable family situation."

Yet there is a significant difference between Stephen Covey and the radical postmodernists. Covey reaches millions of Americans. And so there is something wrong when conservatives attack feminism for weakening the family and ignore (when they do not actually praise) the work of a bestselling writer as morally anarchistic as Stephen Covey. If the American family is in trouble, it may be because too many Americans have already followed Covey's nonjudgmental advice. "Whatever your situation," he writes, "it is vitally important that you do not compare your family to any other family." What could sound more reasonable? And what could be more misguided? The fact is that families work when the individuals who comprise them struggle through conflict, and judge themselves by judging others, and negotiate compromises, and challenge each other's stubbornness, and insist on the dignity of disagreement, and find unexpected and imperfect resolutions. You do not make a successful family by following principles alleged to be universal for no other reason than that someone claims them to be universal.

Moreover, a family is not a business, or a corporation, or a bureaucracy. You do not make a successful family by consulting books, tapes, guides, and a Web page to know what to do next. You make a successful family by taking the resources offered to you by culture, church, history, society, tradition, even government—all those things for which Covey has nothing but suspicion—and shaping them to your needs.

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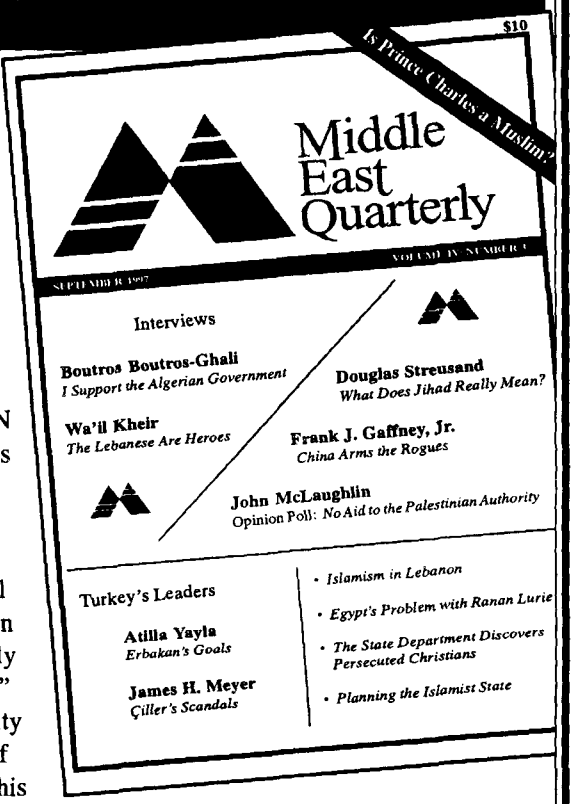

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For many non-Mormons, Joseph Smith has never lost his shady reputation. Time has not mellowed the sense that he was a confidence man whose theological ideas, had it not been for the brilliant organizational abilities of his disciples, might have disappeared into a footnote in the history of American religion. But there is little doubt that Smith understood one thing. Take insecure people, offer them an answer to their problems, clothe your advice in language that seems intelligent but is mostly gibberish, proclaim the world rotten yet demand changes that require little or no transformation in how people actually live—and, who knows, maybe you will be called a prophet. •

The Know-It-All

BY COLIN MCGINN

How the Mind Works by Steven Pinker

(Norton, 660 pp., $29.95)

Theories of mind have always been shaped around images, metaphors, and analogies. The dominant picture of mind since the Renaissance—it is common to classical empiricism, which embraced consciousness, and modern behaviorism, which eschewed it—is the *tabula rasa*: the blank ledger upon which the environment leaves its trace as the mind is given whatever structure and content it finally possesses. Originally, the mind is conceived to be neutral, void, unbiased, plastic, undifferentiated—a mere vacuum awaiting the rush of sensory experience. The mind is able to copy experience, to detect its regularities, to order its deliverances into categories; but innately it is just a formless sponge soaking up the environmental contingencies. Behavior, in consequence, is under no innate constraint or predisposition; it simply reflects the experience of the organism, whatever that may be. Everything mental is up for grabs. There is no human nature. Our essence is nothingness.

And in this primal poverty lies the promise of unlimited optimism about human life and society. We can make of ourselves whatever we choose, so long as we select an appropriate environment to constitute the developing mind. The road to utopia is through education, in the broadest sense. An entire political and cultural ideology thus predicates itself upon a theory of mind organized around an image: that the mind starts out as a pristine and promiscuous emptiness, upon which experience leaves its mark; that it is completely open to whatever the inscribed text might happen to record or prescribe; that the pages of our mind have no say in what they end up saying.

This conception was powerfully challenged in the 1960s by Noam Chomsky, based upon his work in theoretical linguistics. If anything is environmentally determined, it was previously thought, then surely language is: for languages are learned, foisted on the growing child by loquacious adults. But Chomsky argued persuasively that the human faculty of language is innately structured. The brain is genetically programmed to contain a specification of an abstract system of syntactic rules that are brought to bear on the incoming acoustic flux. These rules are universal in human languages and specific to them; there is nothing formless about syntax.

The analogy preferred by Chomsky is that of the anatomical structure of the body: just as we do not learn to have arms and legs and kidneys, but have these organs as a matter of our innate endowment, so our mind is best understood as an organized collection of innate cognitive faculties or modules, among which language is one. We acquire a language by virtue of the prior linguistic knowledge coded innately into our brains, not because our brains are empty receptacles equipped merely to retain the traces of the linguistic inputs they have received. And the rules of language are quite specific, so the language faculty has a structure peculiar to itself, not shared by other mental faculties. Where empiricism pictures the mind as a presuppositionless general-purpose learning device, the nativism favored by Chomsky stocks the mind with dedicated and intricate subsystems that shape mental functioning from the very start. The infant mind is more like a library of advanced textbooks than it is like a diary awaiting its entries to give it identity and substance. A massive amount of what we end up knowing, we know by instinct.

This is the general picture defended by Steven Pinker in *How the Mind Works*, a kind of general theory of the special theory that he defended in *The Language Instinct*. His new book is large, wide-ranging, attractively written, and generally well-argued. In some ways, it is almost too good: Pinker is such an engaging and intelligent exponent of his views that it is sometimes too easy to be carried along by flights of speculation that need to be critically curbed. I am myself inclined to agree with, or at least to take seriously, vast tracts of the position that Pinker defends, with a caveat here and a not-so-fast there; but readers should be warned that none of this is beyond controversy and none of this is simply "scientific fact." What Pinker presents may be the most convincing general theory of mind currently on offer—but then that was true of Greek astronomy. In psychology, moreover, paradigms come and go with startling rapidity. Evolutionary psychology, in particular, though offering a fresh perspective on human behavior, should not aspire to the condition of dogma at this early stage of inquiry.

The theory that Pinker advocates might be called Cognitive Darwinism. It has four central components: computationalism, modularity, innateness, adaptationism. *Computationalism* is the notion that the mind is a neural computer, a device for processing information on the basis of a symbolic code. It works by performing operations on strings of symbols with a view to solving goal-directed problems, such as forming accurate representations of the environment. The neural hardware exists in order to give the computational software something to run on. *Modularity* is the notion that the mind is modular, in the sense that it incorporates a motley of distinct "computer programs," each with its own function and mode of operation. There are modules for language, for vision, for commonsense physics, for understanding the minds of others, and so forth. Each has its own location in cognitive space, its own principles, its own domain of expertise. *Innateness* is the notion that these computational modules are genetically fixed, as much a part of our human nature as our bodily organs, and as variable across species as animal bodies are. Birds have an instinct for migration, we have an instinct for speaking; birds have wings genetically, we have arms. The environment affects the growth of arms as it does the growth of language, but in neither case does it create the organs in question.

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Adaptationism is the notion that these innate computational modules are biologically functional—they evolved by natural selection, and they have a purpose that is keyed to the conditions in which they evolved. Ultimately, their function is to perpetuate the genes in the kind of environment that originally selected them.

Adaptationism is perhaps the most controversial of these notions. It is not entailed by the innateness claim, as Pinker is aware, since not everything that is genetically determined has an adaptive function. Some traits of an organism are merely by products or side-effects of what exists by dint of its adaptiveness. Seeking an adaptationist explanation for every innate characteristic of an organism is therefore folly—consider trying to find a function for the color of blood or the beauty of birdsong. Moreover, according to the evolutionary psychology that Pinker endorses, the innate traits of contemporary humans are not adapted to the current environment, but to the ancient environment in which our genetic blueprint was minted—that of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, long before agriculture, contraception, literacy, capitalism. Thus the environment to which we are genetically adapted is strikingly different from the environment that now determines our fate. We are indeed in all sorts of ways maladapted to our current environment. Pinker offers a cute example of this in our fear of snakes and spiders compared to our blasé attitude toward cars and guns—rational enough when the former were the life-threatening forces, but obsolete in the age of death by crash and bullet. Our innate phobias have failed to keep up with the actual dangers we face.

Pinker adopts the "selfish gene" model of animal behavior, according to which we are programmed with traits and propensities that are likely to cause our genes to replicate themselves in descendant organisms. His book is thus a grand synthesis of neo-Darwinian gene-based natural selection theory and the computational model of mind favored by contemporary cognitive science. Our genes build us to have heads that house a confederacy of interacting biological computers, the better to get themselves flung into future generations. They invented the first computing machine (not Alan Turing), and they found it to be an excellent tool for propagating themselves. The job of the science of mind is therefore to specify the programs that our cerebral computers contain, and to explain what adaptive functions they serve.

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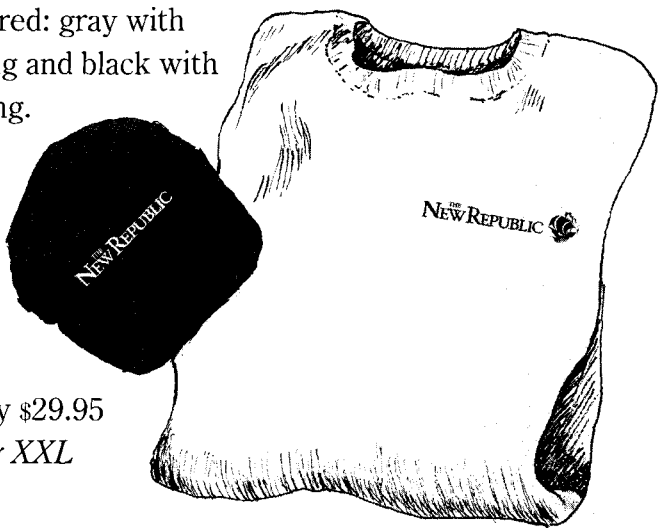

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Psycholinguistics, for example, will articulate the contents of the language module, conceived as a computational device, and identify the evolutionary pressures and strategies that promoted the installation of this module in our heads.

Pinker explains all this with exemplary clarity and breadth, dispelling many misconceptions about the approach and providing a convenient survey of much current thinking about the mind and its place in nature. He is generally circumspect about the philosophical significance of the science that he expounds, being commendably clear, for example, about the logical gulf separating the scientific facts (or theories) from the ethical issues of right and wrong. He is in no danger of confusing what is "good" for the genes, in the sense of causing their propagation, with what it is ethically good for human beings to do. Only toward the end of the book, in a chapter called "The Meaning of Life" (always a bad sign), does the temptation to overreach and to distort get the better of him—as when he tries to explain the value of art and music and literature in Darwinian terms. There is little plausibility in his contention that we find those landscapes attractive that resemble the savannah in which our ancestors did most of their evolving. Here he comes very close to committing a familiar fallacy: trying to explain the intrinsic value of something in terms of the psychological responses of observers. Pinker cannot accept that something might possess an objective aesthetic value that we have the capacity to appreciate; no, the value has to be a projection of some psychological buzz that we experience for adaptive reasons.

He is on much firmer ground when considering the mechanics of vision. The biological function of vision is clear enough: to gain information about the layout of the environment. But fulfilling this function turns out to be a surprisingly difficult task. The brain must convert a two-dimensional pattern of light impingements on the retina into a stereoscopic representation of objects in the world. As researchers into artificial vision have demonstrated, this feat is impossible without making complex assumptions about the kind of place that the world is; and so the visual system needs to work with a richly structured prior theory about the world in which it finds itself. It must assume that matter is cohesive, that surfaces tend to be uniformly colored, that discontinuities of light indicate edges—since none of this is contained in the retinal image itself. The visual module has evolved in a physical world of a certain general kind, and it works by betting on the persistence of such a world.

If we were plopped down in a very different kind of world, our eyes would be incapable of representing it correctly. Once again, rich innate structure is what makes the mind work at all, even in the area in which empiricists felt most confident: our sensations of the world around us. Concepts of the external world are not derived from sensory inputs, as the empiricists maintained; they are presupposed in the very ability of the mind to deliver coherent perceptions. Kant famously remarked that "intuitions without concepts are blind" ("intuition" being his name for sensation); and he was right. Without a prior contribution from the innate structure of the mind, we would be literally blind. There is an innate "grammar of vision" just as there is an innate grammar proper. Acquiring the ability to see or to talk consists in integrating this innate grammar with the exiguous inputs that pepper the senses.

The chapter of Pinker's book that is most likely to push political buttons is entitled "Family Values." Here he is concerned to deduce the laws of human social psychology from the axioms of selfish-gene theory. He claims that our social emotions closely fit the predictions of that theory, thus confirming the thesis that our affective psychology results from rigidly Darwinian laws. The basic principle is that an organism will care more about another organism the more genetic overlap there is between them, other things being equal, since genes build organisms with propensities that are apt to favor their replication. (If they did not, they would cease to figure in the gene pool.) Thus we tend to care most about ourselves, a lot about our children, quite a bit about our siblings, a fair amount about our cousins, and not terribly much about strangers.

This basic principle has to be modified to handle the complexities of actual social life, but Pinker puts it forward as the underlying law of human caring. Some of the more unpalatable consequences of this view are the competition for resources between parents and children and the deep-rootedness of sibling rivalry. Thus, my child has a genetic interest in bleeding me dry, at my expense and the expense of its siblings, since its genes are dedicated to their own survival; but my genetic interest lies in conserving my resources for purposes of future reproduction, since that way I will get a whole new copy of my genes into existence. Pinker believes that the dynamics of the family actually conform to the perspective of the genes, at least in broad outline.

Then there are the implications for the relations between the sexes, which are far from politically correct. It turns out that the genetic interests of men lie in deceiving women into believing that they will stick around to bring up their children, when in fact their genes are conspiring to make them inject sperm into the next nubile young woman, while similarly deceiving her. Paternal irresponsibility is the genes' prime directive. The genes of women, on the other hand, are intent on establishing a stable family life, supported by a rich, strong husband, and they deem promiscuity a pointless enterprise in light of the realities of childbearing. Female genes are deep into fidelity and maternal love. All this is argued to be a consequence of the selfishness of genes combined with the obvious asymmetry between the sexes when it comes to bringing children into the world—chiefly, the fact that women spend nine months infertilely carrying a child, while males suffer no decline in fertility by making a woman pregnant.

This kind of coldly biological account of the origins and logic of human emotions and practices is applied to romantic love, friendship, war, rivalry, the accumulation of wealth, status, infanticide, the kidnapping of women, untrustworthiness, fashion, property, beauty, polygyny, testicle size, incest, stepfathers. These all flow smoothly from the theory that our desires are calibrated so as to maximize the prospects of our genes in producing copies of themselves. Thus, friendship is based on reciprocal altruism, or the principle that if I help you today you will help me tomorrow; and polygyny is a way for males to get more of their genes into the gene pool; and beauty is an indicator of health and reproductive potential. No doubt all these qualities are modified by supervening factors, but their biological basis is held to consist in gene wars raging beyond our awareness.

That is not to say that we are selfish because our genes are. Quite the contrary. It can serve the genes to build unselfish organisms, since that is most likely to benefit the copies of the genes that sit in the bodies of other organisms—notably, our kin. Unless I reproduce, my genes are gone when I am; so my genes had better build me to want to reproduce (which in our ancestral environment was equivalent to having sex), and to want to ensure the health of my children. Nor are the genes themselves literally selfish: they have no emotions or goals, they simply obey the logic of replication—that is, the genes that make organisms that succeed in replicating them are going to be around to make

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other such organisms in the future. The genes are selfish willy-nilly; their "selfishness" is simply a consequence of the laws of replication.

This is a theory of the causes of our emotions, not of their contents. I do not desire my child to be healthy because I desire to perpetuate my genes. (People only found out about genes relatively recently, after all.) I have the desire to help my child because my genes caused me to have this desire—and not, say, because I was taught so to desire. The selfish-gene story is a claim about the natural etiology of our desires, not an analysis of what those desires are desires for. The first step in arriving at this theory is to notice that the social emotions of species differ depending upon their actual conditions of life; the second step is to seek an explanation for these emotions, preferably one that recognizes that minds evolved just as bodies did.

It is not logically necessary that we should care more for our children than for strangers. So why do we feel the way we do? I would agree with Pinker that the selfish-gene theory provides a simple, systematic, predictively successful theory of this phenomenon, well integrated into what else we know of animal species. It is a better theory than any other theory on offer, better than Freud's or Marx's or Skinner's or the social constructionists'. What marks it off from many other approaches to human psychology is its insistence that our minds not be viewed as essentially different from the minds of other species. This is not to say that the theory should be treated as a dogma—it is simply a scientific hypothesis like any other, to be assessed by its explanatory and predictive power, and compared to its rivals. By these criteria I think it scores highly. It certainly brings order to what otherwise seems adventitious and unsystematic. And it would obviously be quite wrong to assess it in terms of its political ramifications.

A question that looms over all this is whether the biological approach to human psychology allows for free will and moral responsibility. If males are prompted by their genes to be promiscuous, does that mean that they cannot be held responsible for their actions? Does moral culpability go out of the window? Praise the Lord, the answer is no. Think of free will and conscience as a separate mental module coexisting with the sexual-behavior module. When the sex module outputs a command to the motor system to be promiscuous, the conscience module may issue a counter-imperative—to the effect that it is morally wrong to be promiscuous. Since we cannot derive our morality from the natural biological laws of behavior, our moral faculty might well disagree with the tendencies that our genes have built into us; and the free will faculty may have the power to control those tendencies, thus overriding our sexual promptings.

To say that our genes program our emotions in a certain way is not to be a biological determinist about human action, since emotional dispositions can be overridden by other components of the mind. As Pinker points out, theories that explain our emotions in terms of how we are reared also depict our emotions as caused, but that does not by itself imply that we have no control over those emotions. The innatist theory is no more deterministic than the environmental theory; they simply differ in what the causes of behavior are, not in whether behavior has causes. So there is no refuge in selfish-gene theory for the kind of complacent excuse-mongering to which we are sometimes subjected ("it wasn't me, it was my genes"). Human beings manifestly have certain immoral tendencies—whether they come from Adam's fall, regression to the anal phase of development, Skinnerian conditioning, the effects of capitalism, the machinations of wily little strands of DNA; but we also have the power to acknowledge our immoral tendencies and to resist the desires that go with them. Our moral salvation lies in the war among our mental modules. In old-fashioned terminology, conscience can govern passion.

What, then, is Pinker's theory of the biology of free will? He is purporting to tell us how the mind works—so let's hear how *that* part of the mind works. At this crucial point, however, his theoretical confidence deserts him—and reasonably enough. He spends the last few pages of his book agreeing with the present reviewer that certain central aspects of the mind are deep mysteries that are unlikely ever to be resolved by human intelligence. The list of these mysteries is not short or trivial: sentience, the self, free will, meaning, knowledge, morality. None of these, Pinker concedes, can be explained in terms of the modular computational Darwinism that he employs as his theoretical fulcrum. He writes: "People have thought about these problems for millennia but have made no progress in solving them. They give us a sense of bewilderment, of intellectual vertigo. McGinn shows how thinkers have cycled among four kinds of solutions over the ages, none satisfactory." Thank you. And Pinker goes on to pour

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cold water over every theoretical approach to these problems known to man. We are dealing here with questions that fall into Chomsky's category of mysteries—questions our minds are not constructed to answer as a matter of principle.

This admission of theoretical bafflement sits uneasily with the confident tone of Pinker's book, amounting as it does to the concession that vast areas of the mind's essential nature remain unexplained. Pinker's book might more accurately have been called *How a Small Part of the Mind Works.* But that has much less of a ring to it. To have nothing to say about the nature and the function of consciousness in a book purporting to tell us how the mind works strikes me as, let us say, a gap. Indeed, in the preface to the book Pinker confesses that we don't understand how the mind works, not in general. What, then, is the justification for his boastful title?

Pinker is right to point out that this admission of theoretical limitation is a natural consequence of the evolutionary view of the mind, since human intelligence is itself at root a biological product with a brutally pragmatic agenda. "We are organisms, not angels," he writes, "and our minds are organs, not pipelines to the truth. Our minds evolved by natural selection to solve problems that were life-and-death matters to our ancestors, not to commune with correctness or to answer any question we are capable of asking." If our minds are ultimately devices built by our genes to aid them in their quest to replicate, then it is hardly to be expected that every riddle of the universe should be open to our understanding. Successful science is plausibly regarded as an offshoot of the capacities with which natural selection equipped us for its own narrowly circumscribed ends, but there is no guarantee that every intellectual problem we can formulate will fall into the class of questions answerable by a mind thus formed.

Human reason can extend to problems far removed from evolutionary exigencies, even if, in cases where reason comes up short, the biological basis of mind is the obvious suspect to interrogate. And so it behooves us to proceed modestly and to acknowledge failure where appropriate. Pinker has given us a fine survey of the state of the art in the science of mind, but he should calm down. There is much that remains as baffling as ever.

COLIN MCGINN is the author, most recently, of *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (Oxford University Press).

Life as Memoir

BY ITAMAR KUBOVY

Scratches
by Michel Leiris
translated by Lydia Davis
(Johns Hopkins, 258 pp., $15.95)

Scraps
by Michel Leiris
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(Johns Hopkins, 241 pp., $15.95)

Michel Leiris was a poet, a critic, an ethnographer, a memoirist—and one of France's greatest little-known writers. He was born in 1901, and raised in a bourgeois Parisian home. He came of age in the Surrealist crowd of Max Jacob, and published his first volume of poetry, *Simulacre*, in 1925, when he was 24. He met the leading artists and intellectuals of his day; and many of them, including Bataille, Miró, Picasso, and Giacometti, remained lifelong friends. After a nervous breakdown in 1929, he joined a two-year scientific mission to West Africa, where he studied tribal rituals. The trip stimulated Leiris's interest in exotic cultures, and led to the writing of his first book of ethnography, *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934).

Back in Paris, Leiris began working as a curator for the Musée de l'Homme, an association that would continue for the rest of his life and send him on several additional journeys abroad, to Africa and the Caribbean. In 1939, he served briefly as a soldier in the Sahara during the "phony war," but returned to spend the Occupation as a civilian, working and writing at home. An elegant man of small build and shaved head, Leiris led an active social life, and was a connoisseur of jazz, bullfights, and the jitterbug. From 1942 on, he lived in a large Left Bank apartment overlooking the Seine, with his wife Louise Godon, whom he married in 1926 and stayed with until her death more than 60 years later. His routine—working days in his basement office at the museum and writing evenings at home—continued until he was well into his 70s, and his numerous works of poetry, ethnography, and art criticism are still read in France today.

Leiris's importance is really owed to the eccentric form of autobiography that he invented. He worked at it all his life, notably in *Manhood* (1939), and in the four volumes of *The Rules of the Game* (1948, 1955, 1966, 1976). The first two volumes of *The Rules of the Game*, *Scratches* (1948) and *Scraps* (1955), are now available in English, admirably translated by Lydia Davis. In these books, Leiris hardly mentions any of his achievements. Instead, we encounter a man colossally haunted by a sense of failure. Leiris described his condition clearly: "Always beneath or above concrete events, I remain a prisoner of this alternative: the world as a real object which dominates and devours me ... in suffering and in fear, or else the world as a pure fantasy which dissolves in my hands, which I destroy without ever succeeding in possessing it."

Writing was supposed to alleviate the "impotence—as much genital as intellectual" that prevented him from feeling present in the world, and the books that resulted form a narrative of pursuit and mourning unlike any other in our age of confessional literature. Leiris's work reads like transcripts of therapeutic sessions that ramble, digress, backtrack, and freely associate. Whether he revisits a childhood memory of playing with a toy soldier, or describes sexual adventures with a North African prostitute, or recounts a night of celebration turned to violence at the end of World War II, he is always looking for a way to enter his past by remembering it.

Turning his ethnographic skills on himself, he often starts with a word that he misunderstood as a child, and scratches away at the artifact until associations from his past begin to stir. As if resuscitated from their sleep, these memories acquire the vitality of something taking place in the present. Associating myths and historical events with recollections of personal conquest and defeat,

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he tries to collapse the distance between the writer and the remembered self and to construct a continuity that might allow him to feel present and engaged. "Sunday," a chapter in *Scratches*, is characteristic of the movement of Leiris's work.

"Sunday" was written during the war, but it begins with an excerpt from a journal entry of 1929, about a misanthropic weekend outing to the Ile-de-France. After a quick digression in which, among other things, he describes the purpose of keeping his journal and the oppressiveness of the Nazi stronghold on Europe, Leiris tries to discover why Sundays have always had such a stultifying effect on him. He recalls spending time with his stockbroker father, specifically the man's frightful puns and intentional mispronunciation of his son's first name—"Michenne," he would call him. From there he moves to his rightful name "Michel," which, by way of the archangel, leads to religion, childhood prayers, and his adolescent pursuit of cash. Then, an interruption—a knock on his study window informs him that the British have crossed the channel.

Affected by the news, Leiris challenges himself: while he has been writing about himself, a war has been raging outside. But a paragraph later he is back to his unfinished economic theme. He recalls his guilt at the dismissal and the subsequent suicide of a servant from his childhood home, and remembers judging classmates according to their wealth. Classmates bring him to his schooldays, and a teacher who influenced his desperate search for a profession. Work leads to the word "progress," and, pulling back to more abstract ground, Leiris examines the idea in terms of both the individual and civilization. "Progress" flows elegantly into his obsession with time and death, and under these grander themes he mentions his writing, the war, sex with his wife, and Shakespeare. Finally, "as though to come full circle," he reprints the continuation of the 1929 excerpt which makes it clear that the problem with Sundays stems from the fact that the day of rest, free from all cares and responsibility, provides us with an unobstructed view of our mortality.

The dangers of this kind of meandering are obvious. Leiris ventures so far from his point of departure that we have grounds to worry that he will never return. As we read on, however, connections and linkages arouse the suspicion that every thought will somehow relate to the whole—in the way that an improvisation in jazz may recklessly roam to the far reaches of musical experience before searching for a way back to the theme. The further one strays, the more exciting one's return. Leiris worked on the 70-page chapter for two years, but its turns create the illusion that it was written in one hyperextended sitting—a performance staged for us as we read.

Such incidental pleasures occur often in Leiris. A discussion, in *Scraps*, of his fear of death and his struggle against time leads to an unexpected riff on theater: "The mere presentation of individuals in makeup and costumes moving about in the falsified reality of a stage set and inserted into a time that is not ordinary time makes the stage—providing the truth is wrenched with enough clarity, there, as often as it should be—an antechamber to that other world that one cannot help constructing when one tries to imagine death." Or in the same section, an interpretation of sexual intercourse: "Making love amounts, in short, to reverting to a state of indistinctness in order to attempt to remedy the original lesion, and would thus explain why the desire a man feels for a woman is necessarily ambiguous." Sometimes these striking kernels are enigmatic knots to be unraveled by the reader, and sometimes they are aphorisms eloquent in their simplicity: "There are two terms, after all: what is seductive, and what one regards as the Good. Need I emphasize how much easier everything would be if one could find a legitimate way to make these two terms coincide all the time?"

Leiris's associative method and obsession with the past resemble the techniques of psychoanalysis, but there is a significant difference: the moments of engagement sought by Leiris never last long enough to transform his perceptions of himself in the world. The flashes of recognition that he deems to be "real" always give way, returning him to the state of torpor in which he began. Like Faust, who was cursed by the power to attract inspiration without being able to retain it, Leiris worked day after day for decades to recapture this sense of presence. But his anguish in life did not decrease. On the contrary, as time went on, the gap between the two sides of his double existence, the writer and the written, the lived and the remembered, only widened.

He described his existence as "the mechanical works of a zombie," in a "cottony sort of world inhabited now only by vague forms"; and the pull of the imaginary or remembered world of his writing became stronger:

> Here I am, then, Narcissus running through the woods and always returning to

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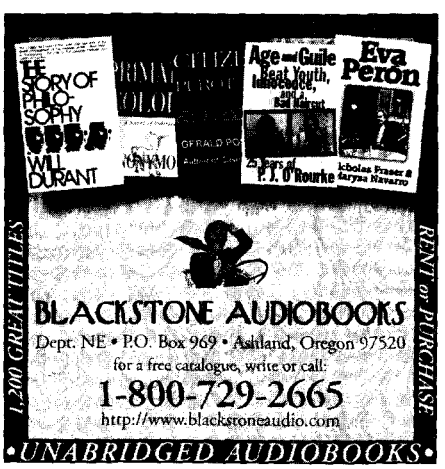

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Catalpa

Nobody saw him, leaning from his wheelchair into the pain
just as his one-time partner's hip swung into reach.
He drew, and quickly slipping barrel first into his mouth
showed everybody in the stationhouse
exactly how the thing is done.

The money from his death came late, too late
to help his daughter, thrown
too many years before head first, they said
she threw herself, who knows
how stoned she was, head first, four stories down
into the bare yard of her tenement.

And now, my friend, his other daughter,
tried all weekend, failed again, and tried
to reach her brother for the holiday.
He lived alone, inheritance, the remnant, sunk by now
into a farmhouse where the phone rang,
and he drank. His ex-wife told my friend:
he drank, and took however long it took
that weekend with his gun
to demonstrate again their father's point.

And now my friend, alive, a thousand miles away,
saw sunlight through the bare catalpa,
ghost pods swinging
under the shadows of the branches on the closet door,
and she was glad to see them, although people say,
about catalpa pods this time of year,
gone brown and crooked, dangling, swinging,
scattered, broken by the wind, over the frozen grass,
that they are ugly. And it's true. They are.

BROOKS HAXTON

the lake where his childhood memories lie sleeping, at first simple markers (mirages, perhaps, arriving at intervals along his walks?), now pure water reflecting back to him the slightly murky but wet and tender image of himself. What still remains to be done, however, is to dive in, to make the liberating jump that will let him immerse himself in these childish waters, waters that become real at that instant.... But here things get complicated, and the comparison turns out to be decidedly mongrel. For the least one can say about it is that Narcissus's leap is a "death leap" which, if it frees him, only frees him by annihilating him.... Whereas I?

Like the masochist who can only feel reality intensely in the fantasy of his own destruction, Leiris could only feel present in the fantasy of his written reflection. Knowing that such a merger could not be realized, still he persisted, prizing the pursuit over its satisfaction. A man who thrived on absence, loss, and failure, his work became not a remedy for his isolation, but a justification of it. Describing his erotic attachment to the innocuous and unintentional caress of a stranger who brushed up against him on the street, he writes: "I, for one, place great value upon trivial effusions of this sort, perhaps because I am not so much a man of passion as a man of longing: someone who leaves things at a distance, in order to preserve his desire for them or his regret at their loss."

Access to what he wanted left Leiris exposed to an immediacy that overwhelmed him, whereas unavailable objects of desire created a safe space for his imagination in which he felt potent and alive. And so failure became the aesthetic principle of Leiris's books. So as always to pursue the unreachable, he erected an insurmountable barrier between himself and what he wanted, and created a literature of failed attempts that swung between his appetite for contact and his disgust at isolation.

At times Leiris's tenacity is exasperating; yet his self-involvement is vindicated by the poetic plasticity of his images. Emboldened by the stalemate of paradox, his imagination finds a seemingly infinite variety of haunting images—allegories, really—to animate his condition. The richness of these emblems seduces us into recognizing his problem in ourselves. In *Scratches*, he describes the memories that he wishes to revive through writing as "no more than a set of needle points ... very sharp needles whose steel glimmers will fascinate me all the more the finer their points, the better suited for perforating and more impalpable they are. Or less cruel needles which I would only ask that they draw music from the almost imperceptible grooves carved on my heart, grooves whose brief transformation into melody would be the only thing capable of briefly saving me." And it is through this image that we understand his pursuit. Even if we don't share his obsession, his perverse metaphor, like something out of Spenser, forces us to react viscerally to his state of mind.

Similarly, when he reviles his own words as "vulgar wads of sound with which I stuff my sentence—like a sick horse into which a dishonest dealer insufflates the appearance of health just before he tries to sell it," we understand his sense of fraud, because his grotesque and comic picture of it is so convincing. Although Leiris remains trapped in the isolation of his perpetual autobiography, and seems never to come closer to the world outside, his images reveal a compassionate familiarity with a broad range of human experience. At times, indeed, his metaphors are so alive that we feel that he has achieved his goal and made direct, immediate contact with the world.

The life that feels vital, for Leiris, is only accessible through writing. Yet his wish that this writing would be able to engage the world never diminished. Wagering his existence upon his capacity to represent it, his poetics obliged him to continue to write as long as he lived. He was adamant that the life-and-death categories with which he described his work were not merely aesthetic concepts, coherent within the rules of the text but "anodyne" with respect to his life. On the contrary, he strived to make his work "an act" that would provoke a response, a moral judgment. In *The Autobiographer as Torero* (1939), the afterword to *Manhood*, he argues that the task of the writer, like that of the bullfighter, is to place himself in mortal danger and then to employ his disciplined artistry in the effort to survive. Writing must always find the equivalent of "the bull's keen horn," Leiris proclaimed, bringing the writer as close as possible to being publicly gored.

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He exposed himself brutally by confessing his infidelities, his acts of self-loathing, and his sexual fantasies, all of which he expected to elicit condemnation from the society in which he lived. But he would comment later that this practice never resulted in the connection for which he longed. Perhaps the most painful description of his sense of failure appears at the opening of *Scraps*, where he describes the disappointment he felt following the publication of *Scratches*:

> This accumulation of pages, which is today nothing more than the instrument of a disillusionment, had as its avowed aim to make us more vigorously alive (as though such an architecture, for which we had been both laborer and material, should, symmetrically, help in our own reconstruction); but now that this book has appeared, one sees that whether it is good or bad, and even if it should mark a stage in our progress toward a little more light, the only sure thing is that it does not exist or—if we make our evaluation without any romantic exaggeration—that its only existence is that of a book that has come to join thousands of other books, probably better than some of them but a book nevertheless and not the quasi-stellar projection of ourselves by which we might have believed that our fate would be—as though magically—transformed.

As soon as *Scratches* appeared, it was dissociated from the self that it was conceived to represent. No longer inspired by the writer's active struggle, the book was simply out there, one among many—in Leiris's eyes, dead.

The critical response to *Scratches* was not encouraging, but *Scraps* was received enthusiastically. Remarkably, it was on the heels of this success, while he was at work on the third volume, *Fibrilles* (1966), that Leiris tried to take his life. It is difficult to determine a clear reason, but judging from the knottiness of his ideas, the attempt was just as much a gesture of commitment to his life's work as an admission of failure. In his writing Leiris always attempted to recreate himself through self-destruction; his goal was to create an art that "excites us too deeply for us not to experience as powerless to satisfy precisely this art which has made us more demanding and given us the desire for something beyond art." The more he wrote, the more he wanted something he could not achieve with words. Seen from within this aesthetic model, attempting suicide was not a resignation but a step forward—a performative act that strove to advance his artistic goals and bring his suffering to an end. It is ironic (or perhaps fitting) that the very writing that drove Leiris to try to take his life gave him a reason to go on living. Again, his failure forced him to continue. Nothing, not even attempted suicide, could free him from his Tantalus-like literary task.

Perhaps more than anything else, the power of Leiris's work comes from his inexhaustible, even naïve, faith in the power of the imagination and the life of the mind. The one thing that he claims to have learned from Freud was "that everything leads back, whatever one does, to a specific constellation of things which one tends to reproduce, under various forms, an unlimited number of times." And indeed, like a character out of Beckett or Bernhard, he repeats his heroic failure over and over again, unable to change his ways. What initially frustrates in his work begins to exemplify the courage and the dignity required to recognize one's limitations even as one knows that they cannot be changed. In a time when pop psychology and New Age nonsense propagate the belief that we are free to discard our history, Leiris's work demonstrates how human it is to struggle with one's past to the end of one's days.

Confessional literature, from Augustine to Rousseau, was always entangled in the idea of atonement, a release without which redemption could not be attained. The writer of confessions always believed that God, or the reader, was listening, whether or not he responded. Today we are flooded with examples of vacuous, self-congratulatory degenerations of this genre. Sensitive to the isolation of our secular age, Leiris, too, craves a response—but he knows that it will not come. Having no faith in external redemption, he directs his confession to himself. Is a literature of confession possible without a belief in redemption? Perhaps not; but at the very least Leiris understands that if it were, it could never end, it would simply stop, without closure or catharsis:

> But clearly I must fall silent now. However mortifying it may be to conclude a book without having reached any real point of arrival (the disclosure of some truth that was not there at the beginning), I will stop, like a locomotive that finds the tracks obstructed and comes to a halt in the middle of the countryside after loosing a volley of whistle blasts.

This is the only way that an honest confession can end, and it is in its way a variety of heroism.

ITAMAR KUBOVY is a writer and theater director in New York City.

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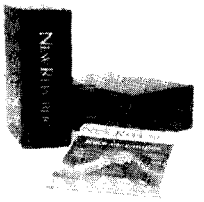
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NEW HAVEN DIARIST

Facing facts

IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT SOMEONE who tries to hold two contradictory beliefs at the same time would experience a great deal of tension and psychic discomfort. Take the person who exercises daily, watches his cholesterol, and consumes a lot of leafy greens—yet continues to smoke, even though he knows it causes cancer. The two attitudes—"I want to stay healthy" and "I'm doing something unhealthy"—are so inconsistent that the individual is likely to feel stupid, defective, maybe a bit crazy. Psychologists have a term for this unstable state of affairs: cognitive dissonance.

PEOPLE HAVE ALL SORTS OF WAYS to handle the tension—to achieve what psychologists call dissonance reduction. A favorite tactic is denial: "Those cancer studies are exaggerated scare tactics." Or you can try rationalization: "The filter tip really traps most of the bad stuff." The best and healthiest approach is, of course, to acknowledge the contradictions and to take steps to eliminate them: in the aforementioned example, stop making excuses and quit smoking. But whether you deal with cognitive dissonance in a healthy way or not, you do have to deal with it. For, as social psychologist Elliot Aronson has observed, to maintain within ourselves two sets of ideas that negate each other is to "flirt with absurdity."

THIS BRINGS ME TO A BASIC question raised by the polls tracking the Monica Lewinsky scandal: Aren't a lot of Americans flirting with absurdity right now? Anywhere between 67 and 73 percent of the people think President Clinton is doing a good job. At the same time, a considerable number of people (the same whopping 67 percent) believe that if Clinton did lie about his purported affair with the former White House intern (and especially if he's perjured himself or suborned perjury), then he's unfit to govern. Moreover, only 39 percent of Americans actually *do* believe the president's denials of sexual misconduct in the Lewinsky and previous affairs.

SO WHAT'S HAPPENING? HOW CAN people think that President Clinton *cannot* govern if he is lying, and at the same time think that he probably *is* lying, and still believe that he's putting in an outstanding presidential performance? Is this a sign of collective discretion and judgment or a period of false calm before we all really fall apart?

MY OWN VIEW IS THAT AMERICANS are actually experiencing an unexpected, but entirely welcome, bout of national maturity. Faced with dissonant information about their president, Americans are doing their utmost to deny and rationalize the obvious for as long as possible, and in this instance their reasons for doing so are valid. One reason is that most people like Bill Clinton—or at least they don't dislike him—and they give him credit for doing a good job in office. The country is in good shape; the economy is heading for the stratosphere; crime rates are down; and so we, as a people, are hardly in need of a scapegoat. Nothing crazy about that. Also, if in our heart of hearts we do think he's lying, we're also sympathetic to the plight of a man who's being hounded to answer the kinds of personal questions that many people believe should never be asked of a president (or anyone else) in the first place. We're also considering the credentials of the inquisitors. Are we to believe that the hordes of reporters, not to mention the likes of Lucianne Goldberg, the New York literary agent who "lives for dish," are pure and free of any sexual secrets of their own?

HERE'S ANOTHER, LESS WIDELY acknowledged, element of the public's rationalization: There appears to be a strong undercurrent of opinion (a friend of mine calls it "the infidelity vote") to the effect that if the president *is* telling lies—and "if" still remains operative until all the facts are in—it's because he's been put in a situation where he is literally being forced to do so. Isn't a man who blabs to the world about his sexual exploits—even in a sworn deposition—being cruelly unprotective of the feelings of his family? Is it a good thing or a bad thing that a man is less than totally open in these peculiar, thoroughly unprecedented circumstances? What would any of us do in the same situation?

BESIDES, WHEN WE ELECTED CLINton to be our leader, it was *not* because we expected him to play the role of moral exemplar. We knew about his tendency to get involved in sexual imbroglios when we voted him in. Indeed, as another friend told me, if the body politic seems unmotivated to respond with the high dudgeon and outrage that Clinton's enemies might have anticipated, it is because we've all been inoculated against this kind of scandalmongering by the Gennifer Flowers and Paula Jones episodes already. And not only that: By accepting those affairs, we have all, in a way, become subtly complicit in Clinton's pursuit of subsequent dalliances, if any. We don't want to point the finger of guilt at him because to do so would be to point the finger of guilt at ourselves.

IT ALL DOES MAKE YOU FEEL JUST a bit neurotic. But, fortunately, until all the facts are in and we have to look the dissonant realities squarely in the eye, the public can "compartmentalize." We're placing that unwelcome cognition—"He is lying"—somewhere off in a logic-tight psychological box and hoping that we're never forced (by the outcome of the legal processes currently underway) to open it up and look inside. Because then we really might not be able to handle it.

AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I THINK. But it's hardly the only way to make sense of all the disparate data. The most original and downright riveting explanation of the public's attitudes was offered to me by the renowned psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas. His own theory is that Clinton was elected not in spite of his rambunctious sexuality; he was elected *because of it.* "He is the first *overtly sexual* president of the United States, and at a fantasy level he is exactly the person that the nation really wanted him to be," Bollas told me. It is as if, in the person of this president, sexuality itself had suddenly emerged into the open as an inevitable, essential aspect of human life. His expression of *his* sexuality is to some degree an expression of *our* sexuality, and we can identify with it. At the same time, we all know that sexual desires can be powerful and overwhelming and can turn us into vulnerable, less-than-perfect human beings. "Clinton is, when you think about it, the first post-sexual-revolution president," Bollas told me. "He's the quintessential family man, who clearly loves his wife and daughter and is loved by them—and yet is an amorous explorer. It seems ironic," the analyst added, "that the very qualities we were actually looking for in a president are the qualities that may possibly lead to this president's downfall." Hmmm. Could it be that there's actually a little bit of Monica and Bill in all of us?

MAGGIE SCARF

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